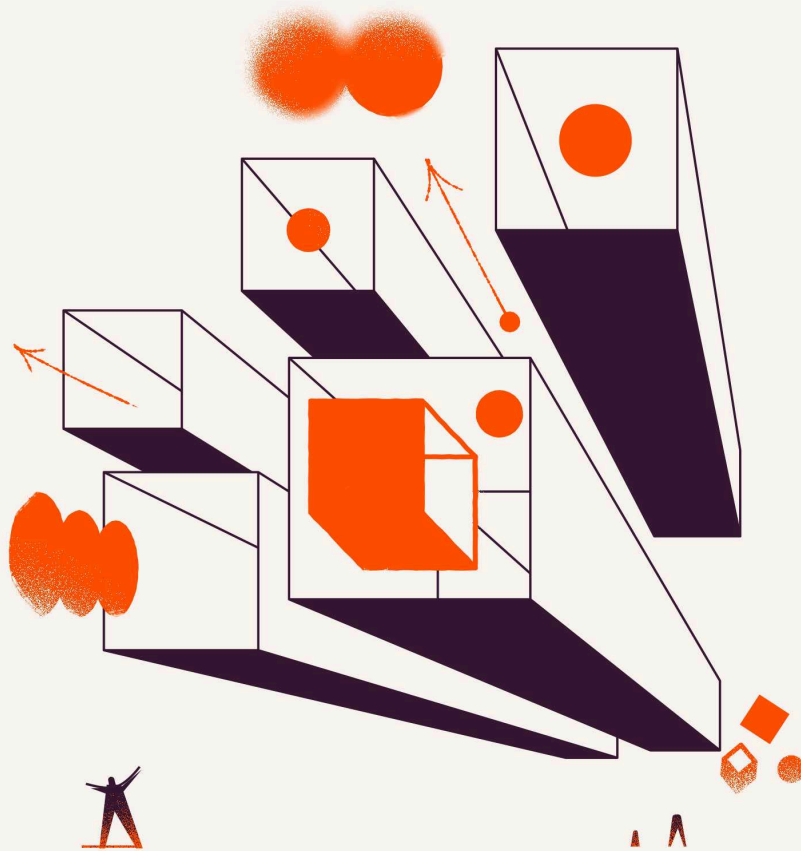


# The rise of shadow AI: Is your organization already at risk?



**zapier**

AI tools are flooding the workplace—often without IT’s knowledge or oversight. Employees are experimenting with generative AI to speed up daily tasks, while leadership is still drafting a roadmap. The result? A dangerous gap between adoption and accountability.

### Most companies are stuck in AI limbo:

- ⊗ No strategy
- ⊗ No governance
- ⊗ No clear ROI

IT leaders are now facing a pivotal moment. You’re responsible for building secure systems, selecting the right tools, and ensuring the business runs efficiently—but when it comes to AI, most organizations lack the infrastructure and integration needed to scale it safely.

Without a clear plan to operationalize AI securely and at scale, you risk falling behind—while exposing your organization to compliance violations, data leaks, and tech debt that’s impossible to unwind.

## In this report, you'll get:

1. **A look at why most organizations are falling behind** when it comes to AI adoption (and ideas to help you catch up).
2. **A deep dive into the compliance and security risks** of shadow AI and how to sidestep them.
3. **A clear, practical roadmap** for building an AI automation strategy that scales—all without sacrificing safety or speed.

## Key findings at a glance

### — Leadership is playing catch up

Nearly all companies are investing in AI, yet only 1% believe they've reached AI maturity. And while almost half of C-suite leaders admit they're moving too slowly, they're 2.4x more likely to blame employees for slow adoption than to recognize their own lack of alignment or direction.

1%

of companies believe they've reached AI maturity—even though most businesses have invested in AI

### — Security is at risk due to shadow AI

Your teams are already using AI—3x more than leaders expect. C-suite leaders estimated 4% are using AI for 30% of their tasks while, in actuality, 13% of employees are using AI. That's not exactly a small gap. And an additional 34% of employees said they'll use AI extensively in the next year—even when these tools are technically “banned” at work.

3x+

the expected number of employees are using AI

### — No AI strategy = no direction

Only 1 in 4 CEOs have a defined AI roadmap in place, and 70% of employees report working without policies, guidance, or clarity. Even in AI-heavy industries, the majority of employees are navigating AI adoption without a playbook—putting security, productivity, and trust at risk.

75%

of CEOs are leading without an AI roadmap

### — Leaders need to level up their workers with AI training

50% of employees want more formal AI training, yet almost half of AI users say their company hasn't offered any training at all. Without clear guidance, employees are left to experiment with powerful tools on their own—creating massive exposure risks.

50%

of employees want more formal AI training

### — Younger employees are leaning in, but no one is maximizing AI ROI

Workers under 50 report the highest AI familiarity, and almost half (46%) of white-collar workers use AI—but mainly for research, content drafting, and idea generation.

46%

of white-collar workers use AI

# 1. Why companies are playing catch up instead of leading the way with AI

Leaders at most companies *want* to integrate AI into their business and reap the rewards. After all, almost 90% of leaders anticipated that deploying AI will drive revenue growth in the next three years.

But in the race to adopt AI, few are moving fast enough to generate the ROI they'd like. In fact, half of C-suite leaders at companies that already deployed AI say their initiatives are still in development—despite many of them launching their first use cases over a year ago.

So, what's getting in the way? Despite early intent and investment, most companies face the same set of challenges:

## ✍ Your use cases don't drive real business value

We know that many teams are experimenting with generative AI, but most of that usage is limited to surface-level tasks—like writing content or summarizing documents. Those are useful, but they rarely move the needle on wider operational efficiency, revenue operations, or customer experience.

Zapier's own survey recently showed that AI adoption on an organizational level remains low at just 21%. To enjoy the rich rewards of AI—like efficiencies spanning teams and departments—broader adoption is crucial.

It's easier to argue for organization-wide adoption when it's clear how AI can benefit your bottom line. One way to demonstrate that is through clear use cases.

When you don't tie AI efforts to real business objectives, it's inevitable that those initiatives will fail. Forrester predicts that 25% of AI initiatives will stall—and that could come down to vague business challenges, implementation challenges, and premature integration into decision-making processes as key obstacles.

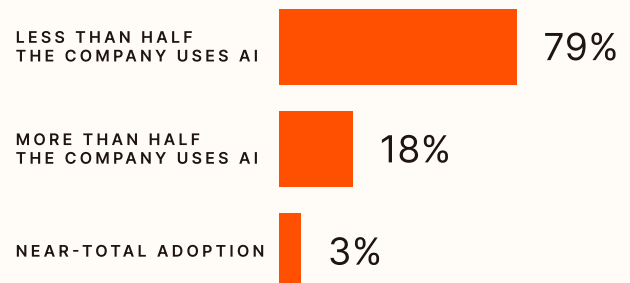
The takeaway? Without assessing use cases that address core business problems, AI efforts stay stuck in pilot mode and never reach their full potential.

# 90%

of leaders anticipated that deploying AI will drive revenue growth in the next three years.

## Most companies haven't adopted AI org-wide

AI use is limited to less than half the company in 79% of organizations—and only 3% have achieved near-total adoption.





## Top use cases for AI-powered systems

- Cybersecurity
- Customer Care
- Business communications
- Translation
- Meeting scheduler
- Digital personal assistance

Learn more about these use cases and how [AI can positively impact your business](#).

## 🕒 Your AI efforts are delayed due to a lack of expertise

Even when teams identify strong use cases—whether for a customer care chatbot or automated lead outreach—they often hit a wall when it comes to execution. Most teams aren't equipped with the technical skills to deploy AI for those use cases themselves—they'd need a little help from engineering. However, most Engineering teams are already stretched thin, or they'd face their own learning curve when it comes to deploying AI at scale.

This reliance on scant technical resources slows everything down and creates bottlenecks, so many of those promising initiatives never make it past the whiteboard.

### HOW ZAPIER USES AI-POWERED SYSTEMS

Curious about how you can deploy AI to break up bottlenecks on your Engineering team? Learn [how Zapier incorporates AI into their engineering workflows](#).

## 🔧 Your low-end AI tools create more friction than value

Many AI tools sound promising in theory, but in practice, they're often early stage, hard to integrate, and not built for enterprise needs. The bottom line is that they simply underdeliver. For example: An AI feature built into your CRM is handy when you're adding new leads, but it doesn't integrate seamlessly with your outreach tool.

Security gaps, performance issues, and lack of scalability make them difficult to trust—and even harder to deploy.

And that's on top of two of the most common AI barriers: data silos and inadequate systems that can't support complex automation. In 2024 alone, [62% of IT leaders reported that their data systems weren't configured to fully leverage AI](#), while **81% said data silos were hindering** their digital transformation efforts. As a result, teams lose confidence, adoption slows, and AI efforts stall before they can make an impact.

## 2. Why is a lack of AI automation strategy an IT risk—and what's at stake?

A comprehensive, company-wide AI automation strategy can take you from playing catch up to leading the pack when it comes to AI transformation. An AI automation strategy documents a company's policies on how employees are allowed to use AI and automation, provides guidance for teams on use cases, and ties your efforts to business outcomes.

But with the aforementioned hesitation around jumping on the AI bandwagon, most organizations haven't created a policy to guide AI automation usage.

Not having this kind of strategy in place puts you at risk of more than losing your competitive edge.

WHAT'S YOUR COMPANY'S **AI READINESS** SCORE?

Discover where your company stands on the path to AI adoption. Uncover ways to upgrade your AI strategy so you can automate smarter and scale faster. [Take the quiz.](#)

### Your company will face security and compliance risks

Here's the bottom line: **Your employees are already using AI.** And the more employees using AI without guardrails (like an AI automation strategy) in place, the more your company faces security risks.

Without clear policies, employees:

- Often turn to AI tools outside approved systems—creating risk exposure
- Copy sensitive data into unsecured platforms
- Misunderstand the limitations of AI (like hallucinations)

Your employees' experimentation unintentionally increases the chance of inaccurate data, breaches, and compliance violations.

3x

Your teams are using AI—about three times more than you'd expect—even if you've banned these tools at work.

It doesn't matter if you've officially "banned" these tools. Your teams are still using AI about three times more than you'd expect. One report shows around **13% of employees are experimenting with AI** and that number will only grow as tools continue to evolve.

Fortunately, establishing a comprehensive strategy that includes AI usage policies is your life preserver in a sea of security risks.



Talk to us—we're happy to answer your tough security questions. While you're here, check out Zapier's security practices and learn how we use AI.

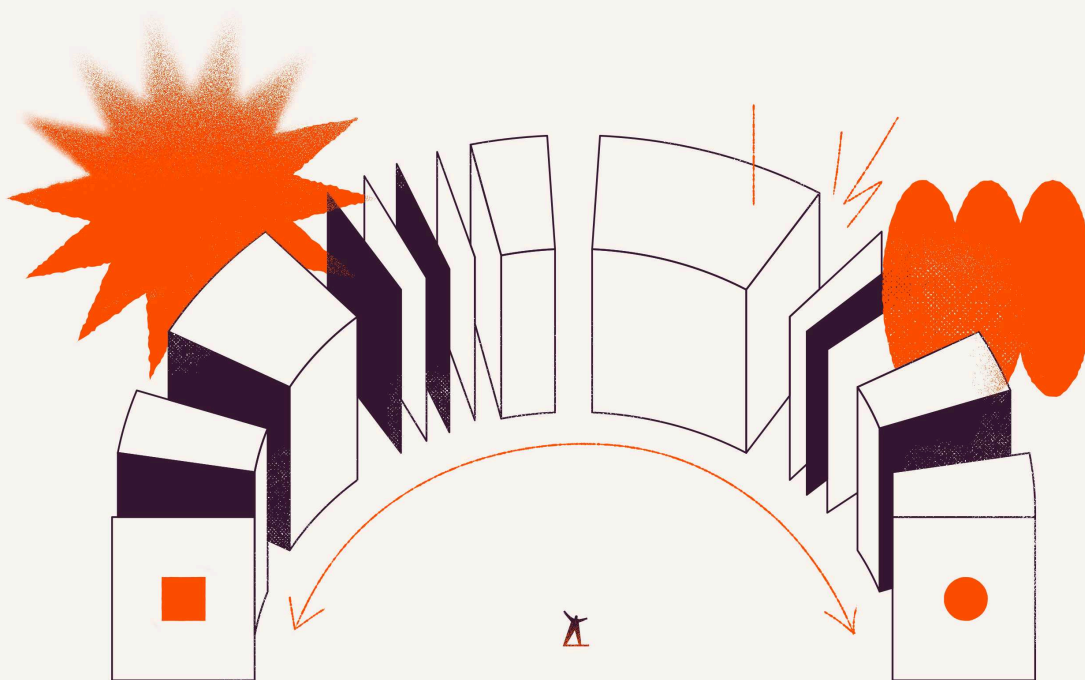
## You'll fall behind competitors

Without AI and a clear strategy, you're not just missing opportunities—you're watching your competitors take them.

No strategy means you likely aren't leveraging AI automation company-wide. Teams waste time working around problems instead of solving them, and you end up hiring more developers or engineers to support those initiatives. This is how innovation dies in the backlog.

And limited resources aren't the only obstacles slowing you down—inefficiencies like disconnected apps, siloed data, and manual workflows cause friction across your organization. This results in project delays, missed goals, and lost market opportunities because you're unable to move quickly.

If you can't move fast, someone else will. Companies that are leveraging AI effectively are gaining a competitive advantage, pulling ahead of you, and seizing the moment around AI.



## Your IT and Engineering teams will hit capacity limits

Without the power and speed of AI automation, businesses often face a massive backlog where non-technical users or lines of business are forced to depend on scarce technical resources (i.e., IT approvals, engineering help).

Without scalable AI and automation support, already-stretched technical teams face growing backlogs. This bottlenecks innovation and pulls focus from higher-impact work.

## Your costs and shelfware increases

A crucial component of a comprehensive AI automation strategy is a roadmap. This plan establishes your company's AI needs and outlines the right tools and features to meet those specific pain points. When employees buy a mish-mash of ad-hoc subscriptions, the AI tools might not address all your pain points and take a bite out of your budget.

Buying AI tools without a clear plan leads to wasted spend. When tools lack real use cases, go unused, or require employee training that hasn't been provided, you end up with shelfware and ballooning costs.

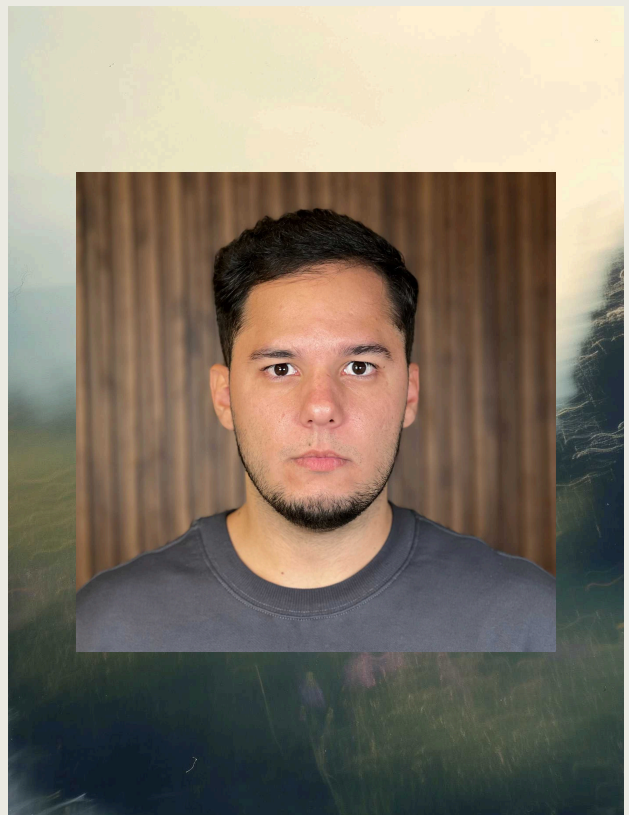


Clínica Somno

“

AI and automation are integral to our business. They help solve complex problems that previously required significant human resources, such as image interpretation and customer support. Using Zapier, we quickly implemented AI solutions, giving us a competitive edge.

— Jonathan Da Silva, Senior Software Engineer,  
Clínica Somno



### 3. How to develop an AI strategy (and get ahead in the process)

Sitting back and doing nothing won't stop the AI race—or your employees from experimenting with new tools. So, what will? Create an AI and automation strategy that supports your unique business goals and is designed to scale.

#### AI STRATEGIES IN ACTION

Spencer Mrozeck, a Digital Experience Strategist at UltraCamp, says his team researched and discussed AI thoroughly before deciding where to implement it in their business.

"There's definitely a difference between using ChatGPT [in the chat interface] and using Zapier. Definitely do your research and have conversations with the right people."

UltraCamp adopted a set of AI use principles to define where they'd use AI—and where they'd draw the line. Now, UltraCamp pairs Zapier with several AI tools to solve challenges across customer support, sales, and marketing.

#### Make the case to leadership

Your employees are ready to embrace AI, and now you're in a unique position to bring leadership along with you. But don't ask for buy-in outright—show them the real business value.

**Learn more about how other organizations are leaning into AI. [Read more and steal their secrets.](#)**



laudable

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What started as a simple Zap at Laudable became an AI-powered system driving operations, growth, and product development.

— Angela Ferrante, Founder and CEO of Laudable

\$240,000+

Laudable saves a year in engineering salaries, by prototyping features and automating full processes with no-code automation.



## The business outcomes can be revolutionary

Execs won't care how impressive AI *appears* if it doesn't actually solve problems across high-impact areas of the organization. That's why you should tie the outcomes directly to what they care about (like scale or speed).

Consider these examples of high-impact AI use cases:

- **Reducing ticket volumes and resolution times** by automating triage or routing paths
- **Empowering teams to self-serve and scale workflows across their departments** including sales, marketing, and operations—without needing IT oversight
- **Automating onboarding and offboarding** workflows to better support teams
- **Improving responsiveness and accuracy** in high-impact processes like onboarding, sales, or support
- **Streamlining business-wide operations** like customer service escalations, contract approvals, marketing campaign launches, and data enrichment—freeing teams to move faster, with fewer dependencies

**The message to leadership:** Faster execution, fewer errors, and more room for teams to focus on strategic work—without IT being the bottleneck.

## CUSTOMER STORIES

"I rolled out an AI agent that I built using [Zapier Agents] for our Sales team, and our Head of Technical Sales saw this and wanted a custom AI agent for a project. In just half an hour, I created a prompt that returns a table with all suitable chargers, key information, and links. What would have taken a week now takes minutes."

Usman Mahomed, Head of Product, egg

## A leaner tech stack is a cheaper one

One of the fastest ways to get leadership on board? Show them where to cut costs. The average business now spends more than \$3,000 per employee on SaaS tools, according to CloudEagle.

A bloated tech stack inevitably leads to high maintenance costs, fragmented tools, and unnecessary licenses. But when you empower teams to build their own solutions, you can pick what you need and cut the rest—freeing up your own IT teams from constantly patching things together.

Think:

- **Letting AI replace niche tools** (like ones for routing support tickets or tagging files) so you can cut licenses you don't need.
- **Reducing custom IT work** by enabling teams to build and manage workflows in a low-code environment.
- **Minimizing integration overhead** by connecting systems through a centralized platform.

**The message to leadership:** AI automation doesn't just make things faster. It makes your stack leaner—and your budget lighter.



\$3,000

Average amount businesses spend per employee on SaaS tools.

## OUR DEFINITION

### AI automation

Integrating artificial intelligence (AI) tools into automated workflows to perform tasks without manual intervention.

## Don't sacrifice speed for safety

One of the biggest upsides of a centralized strategy is control.

McKinsey notes that many leaders are eager to increase AI investments and accelerate adoption—but still view safety and regulation as roadblocks, not opportunities. Even Garner predicts that by 2027, more than 40% of AI-related data breaches will be caused by improper use of AI. Challenges like cybersecurity, biased outputs, and data privacy are real—and employees are worried about them, too.

The C-suite wants to move fast. You want to move safely.  
**But you don't have to choose between the two.**

40%

of AI-related data breaches will be caused by improper use of AI.

## CUSTOMER STORIES

"Every business has repetitive processes that can be automated with AI. The key is using tools like Zapier to optimize time and focus on what truly matters."

Irineu Licks Filho, CTO, Uniplaces



With the right guardrails in place, safety becomes a feature, not a friction point. With AI automation, IT can give teams the freedom to innovate while maintaining visibility and control over how the entire business uses AI.

Think:

- **Improving business agility.** Let teams choose and use the AI tools that solve their day-to-day problems—without waiting on IT.
- **Guaranteeing data security.** Keep sensitive information flowing through approved systems and within your security framework. Learn [how Zapier uses AI](#) and [review our security practices](#) for inspo.
- **Encouraging responsible adoption.** Equip teams with the training and guidelines they need to use AI accurately.
- **Providing different levels of control** with robust governance capabilities to create different permissions and guardrails. That way, anyone in your organization can deploy use cases securely.

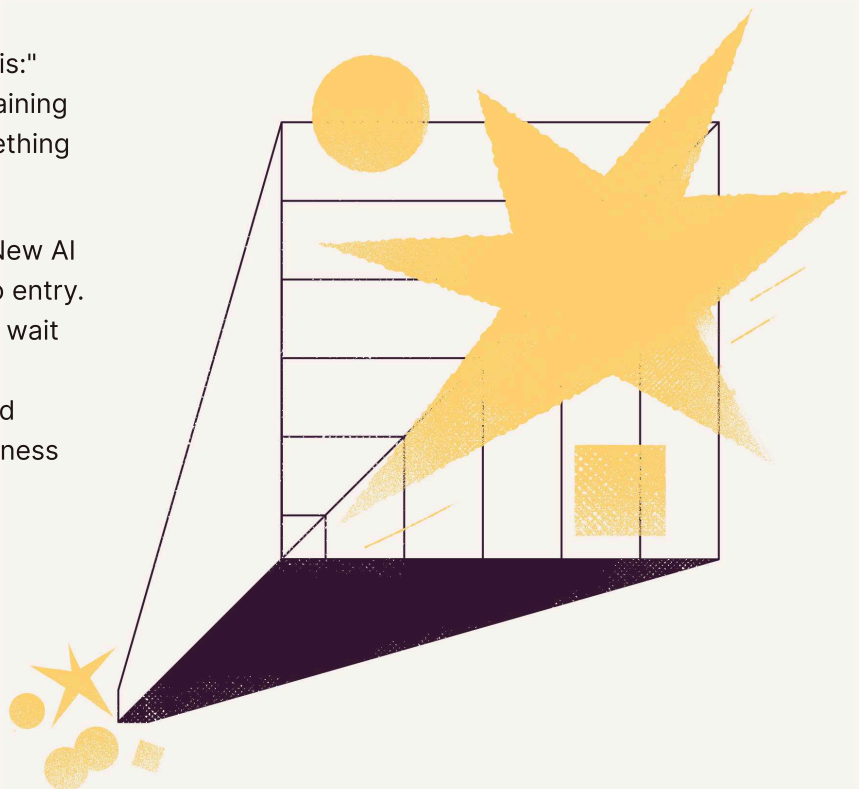
**The message to leadership:** With the right structure (and AI platform) in place, AI can be both powerful and predictable. That's how you move fast and stay safe.

## 🚀 Level up your workforce

AI has opened the door for anyone—not just developers—to ditch manual work and build smarter processes. But most employees are still stuck using simple AI tools like chatbots. They know AI has more to offer, but they don't know how or where to begin.

This is what we've dubbed "use case paralysis:" teams recognize the potential but lack the training or confidence to turn that potential into something that scales.

But your employees don't have to be stuck. New AI tools have dramatically lowered the barrier to entry. You don't need to know how to write code or wait in a backlog queue. With the right access and support, employees can build AI-powered processes and workflows that solve real business problems—and scale across departments.





“

Vector Media is using Zapier not only in IT, but also in other business processes, whether it be our onboarding for employees or customer research for [our] sales team. Zapier has expanded way beyond the technology team and way beyond only people that have technical knowledge.

— Dan Dorato-Hankins, Chief Technology Officer  
at Vector Media



Marketing, Sales, and Support teams don't need to be developers to build what they need. And when they're empowered to do so, the results are faster, more relevant, and closer to the work itself. After all, those who are closest to the problems are far more equipped to solve them.

But that only happens when IT leads the way—by:

1.

**Providing training and context**  
for how AI and automation can be used safely and effectively.

2.

**Encouraging experimentation**  
in environments with the right guardrails in place.

3.

**Supporting managers and team leads** to take use cases from pilot to production.

4.

**Starting small by asking employees** to describe how they're using AI today and how they envision their work being transformed.

This is how Zonos leaders introduced their employees to these tools—and helped them overcome any hesitation in the process.



“

After giving every employee access to Zapier, I started by asking them about their pain points: ‘Tell me what sucks about your job, and let’s start from there.’ Scaling automation isn’t just about scaling the automation itself; it’s about scaling people—helping them focus on what they’re meant to do. By approaching it from the perspective of, ‘I’m here to help you, and I want your automations and systems to do everything they can for you,’ it made people more comfortable with the idea of automating parts of their job.

— Connor Sheffield, Head of Business Automation at Zonos.



## ☆ Seize the window to out-compete with the right AI tools

We're at a turning point. Companies that move quickly—and smartly—will gain a lasting edge over those too cautious to commit. AI adoption is already happening. **What matters now is how you deploy it.**

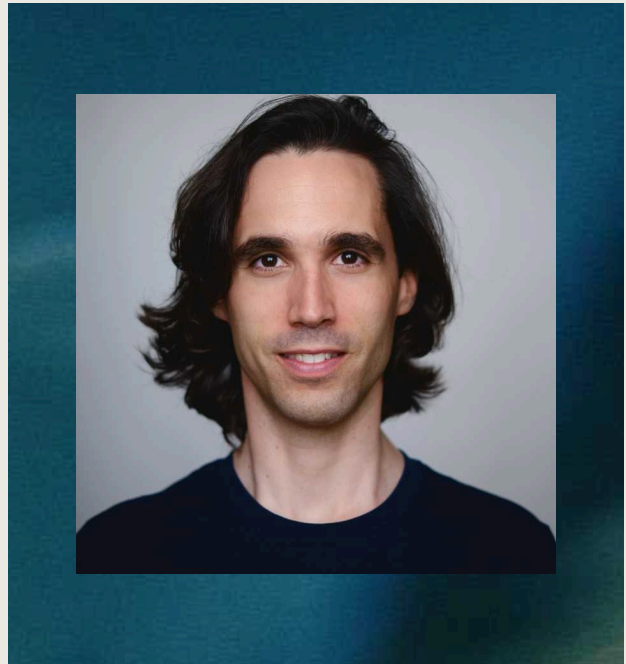
That starts with understanding which tools to use, and that requires policies so your employees get a leg up over the companies too timid to go fast.



“

The IT team managed to scale themselves where they are today through Zapier. Most of the requests and questions that come through are not actually answered by a human—they're automated.

— Marcelo Lebre, Co-founder and President, Remote



Not all AI tools are created equal. To drive impact across the business, you need to match the tool to the task, and give your teams the right help so they can build with confidence. Creating a strategy that explains the differences in these tools (and how best to use them) will help teams use the best AI for their needs.

From AI products like Agents and Chatbots to **more than 300 AI app integrations (including Azure OpenAI and Google Vertex AI)**, you can bring innovative ideas to life and scale your impact on IT operations with Zapier. [Explore our AI guide to learn how.](#)

## Generative AI

You can use AI tools (like ChatGPT or Claude) inside your workflows to handle repetitive, low-risk tasks like summarizing meeting notes, drafting emails, tagging content, or scoring leads. By integrating these apps into your workflows via automation, you'll reduce busywork and free up teams for deeper, strategic work.

**When to use:** High-volume tasks with predictable structure.



Zonos used an AI-powered workflow to create one of its regular emails (and freed up seven employees in the process).

"We built a Zapier workflow that builds our marketing newsletter. It pings ChatGPT with a list of new docs on our site, summarizes those docs, and then puts them into HTML and formats them. It also gathers the contact list from Salesforce and only needs one writer check before being sent out. We used to have about eight people work on this every week and now it's one." said Sheffield, Zonos' Head of Business Automation.

GENERATIVE AI IN ACTION	VECTOR MEDIA: SCALED IT SUPPORT AND ONBOARDING
<p><b>The challenge</b></p> <p>IT staff were manually summarizing support tickets and searching for resources—slowing response times. PeopleOps also managed a 29-step onboarding process manually, which took too long and was often prone to human-error.</p>	<p><b>The solution</b></p> <p>For IT, support tickets in Freshdesk now trigger ChatGPT to summarize the request and suggest responses, stored as private notes for faster resolution. For PeopleOps, a 29-step onboarding Zap built with Zapier Tables handles tasks like password creation, hardware assignment, and document delivery—automatically.</p>
<p><b>Results</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Automation and AI save up to 30 minutes per support ticket</li> <li>The PeopleOps team saves an hour for every new employee onboarded, giving them more time for creative tasks</li> </ul>	<p>"Zapier is integrated into almost every aspect of my company in some way, shape, or form."</p> <p>—Dan Dorato-Hankins, Chief Technology Officer at Vector Media</p>

# Chatbots

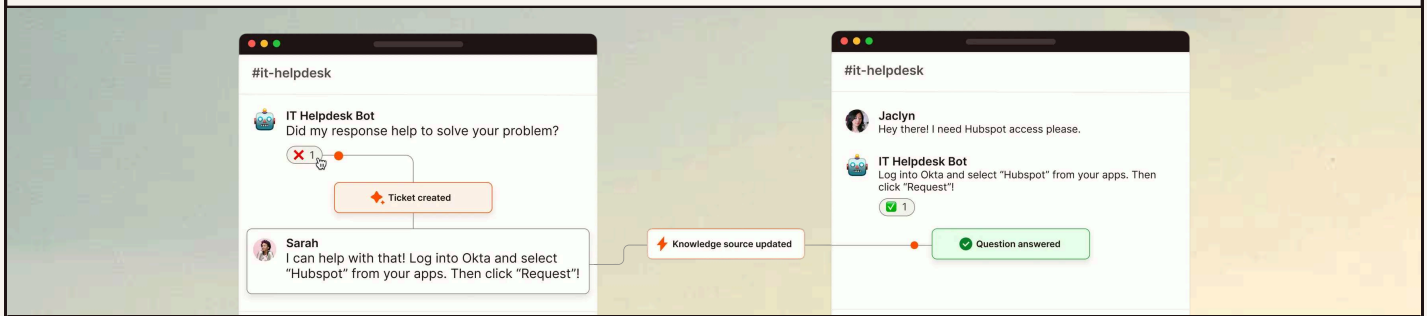
Whether it's qualifying a lead, handling internal support requests, or answering common questions, chatbots bring AI to where people already work: in chat. They respond, guide, and escalate as needed.

**When to use:** Real-time interactions that require responses and routing.

CHATBOTS IN ACTION	REMOTE: AI-POWERED IT HELPDESK
<p><b>The challenge</b></p> <p>After Remote experienced rapid growth, its three-person IT team was tackling 1,000+ tickets each month—risking both burnout and delayed support. Instead of adding headcount, the team adopted an AI-first strategy focused on scaling internal IT operations.</p>	<p><b>The solution</b></p> <p>Using Zapier as their all-in-one enterprise platform, Remote automated their entire IT help desk process using Zapier Agents, Okta, ChatGPT, Notion, and Slack. The system automatically captures tickets, uses AI to determine request priority, and automatically suggests solutions. This approach allows their small team of three to handle over 1,000 requests a month.</p>
<p><b>Results</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 28% of tickets are now resolved in minutes automatically</li><li>• By consolidating legacy tools, Remote saved \$1M in 2024</li><li>• Three-person IT team performs like a team of 10</li></ul>	<p>"Zapier Tables is our repository for all of our [help desk] tickets and knowledge base. When individuals make requests, Zapier Agents can look at our tables with all of our tickets and knowledge base and generate responses. Within a few minutes, it automatically triggers suggested resolutions for the end user, as well as for the members of IT Operations, who might not have encountered this "</p> <p>—Marcus Saito, Head of IT and AI Automation</p>



## STEAL THIS WORKFLOW: IT HELPDESK



Automate your IT help desk and resolve common questions faster—without adding headcount.

When an employee asks a question in Slack, AI searches your internal knowledge base and replies instantly. If the issue needs a human, the request is escalated, prioritized, and turned into a tracked ticket—so nothing falls through the cracks.

[Try it for yourself](#)

## AI agents

Agents go beyond assistance. They take action. These autonomous systems evaluate context, act on real-time data (using your business resources), and can take action in other apps—without requiring manual intervention.

Think of them as digital teammates that scale your operations without growing your headcount.

**When to use:** Dynamic, multi-step workflows that require logic and autonomy.

Recently, the egg team leveraged Zapier Agents to take care of some market research.

"One challenge we had was not knowing industry information for our prospects and customers. We were looking to pay someone to find this information, but with [Zapier Agents], I automated it in five minutes. Because [Agents] can do those Google searches, we're actually able to find live information we can rely on, which is just incredible," said Usman Mahomed, Head of Product at egg.

AGENTS IN ACTION	UNIPLACES: AI-POWERED LEAD ENRICHMENT
<p><b>The challenge</b></p> <p>With thousands of inbound inquiries from students and landlords across Europe, Uniplaces needed a way to scale support and lead engagement—without hiring more agents. Manual lead qualification, payment processing, and multilingual support were time-consuming, costly, and hard to maintain during peak seasons.</p>	<p><b>The solution</b></p> <p>Uniplaces adopted a company-wide AI strategy powered by Zapier to streamline lead routing, automate payments, and speed up customer support. AI is used to score leads, respond to low-quality inquiries, and automatically route qualified contacts to Salesforce.</p>
<p><b>Results</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 100% lead engagement: With AI-backed automation, Uniplaces moves forward with every qualified lead, improving conversion rates.</li><li>• Three to four minutes saved per lead: AI-driven classification and routing have drastically reduced agents' workload, freeing them up to focus on high-priority leads.</li><li>• \$30,000+ saved annually: Automating lead qualification, payments, and multilingual responses has led to significant cost reductions across various departments.</li></ul>	<p>"One of our first use cases with Zapier, which we still use today, involves automating the entire process from lead generation to payment. After a user selects a plan on our landing page, everything from capturing the lead to generating a Stripe link and tracking payments is handled 100% by Zapier. This setup allowed us to quickly validate business ideas—if they worked, we could develop further; if not, we could move on. Zapier gives us a fast and efficient way to test and implement ideas that might otherwise remain just ideas. "</p> <p>—Irineu Licks Filho, CTO</p>



## STEAL THIS WORKFLOW: AI-POWERED LEAD QUALIFICATION

AB

**Alexandra Boehm** Today at 10:10am

Qualify new leads and prepare an outreach email.



**Smart Lead Qualifier and Outreach Automator** Today at 10:11am

Sure, I'll qualify the new leads and prepare an outreach email.

Running behavior...



Lead Qualification and Outreach

Let AI handle your early stage sales tasks. This template filters out unqualified leads, enriches good ones with company data, and drafts a personalized outreach email—so your team can focus on the deals that actually matter.

When a new lead hits your table, Zapier Agents gets to work to qualify it based on email domain, enriching with Clearbit, checking revenue and company size, then pushing qualified leads to Slack and prepping your outreach in Gmail.

[Try it for yourself](#)

## Model context protocol (MCP)

MCP is a framework for developers who are building their own AI models or assistants. It gives those models access to data from business apps—and the ability to act on that data—without needing custom integrations.

By connecting through MCP, developers can instantly give their AI tools access to thousands of apps and workflows, enabling more useful, context-aware, and action-oriented AI.

**When to use:** When you're building your own AI assistant and need it to both understand data and take action across your tech stack.

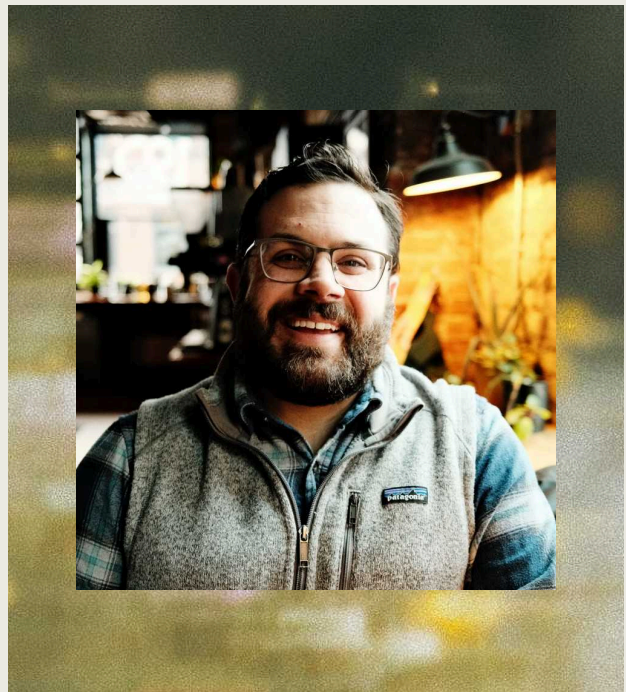
With the right enablement, **your employees won't just adopt AI—they'll operationalize it.** And that's what separates companies that experiment from companies that scale.

### CONTENT SQUARE

“

[Zapier is] the best in a combination of power and ease of use. I know I can cover everything from the simplest single action automations to incredibly complex workflows with AI integrations.

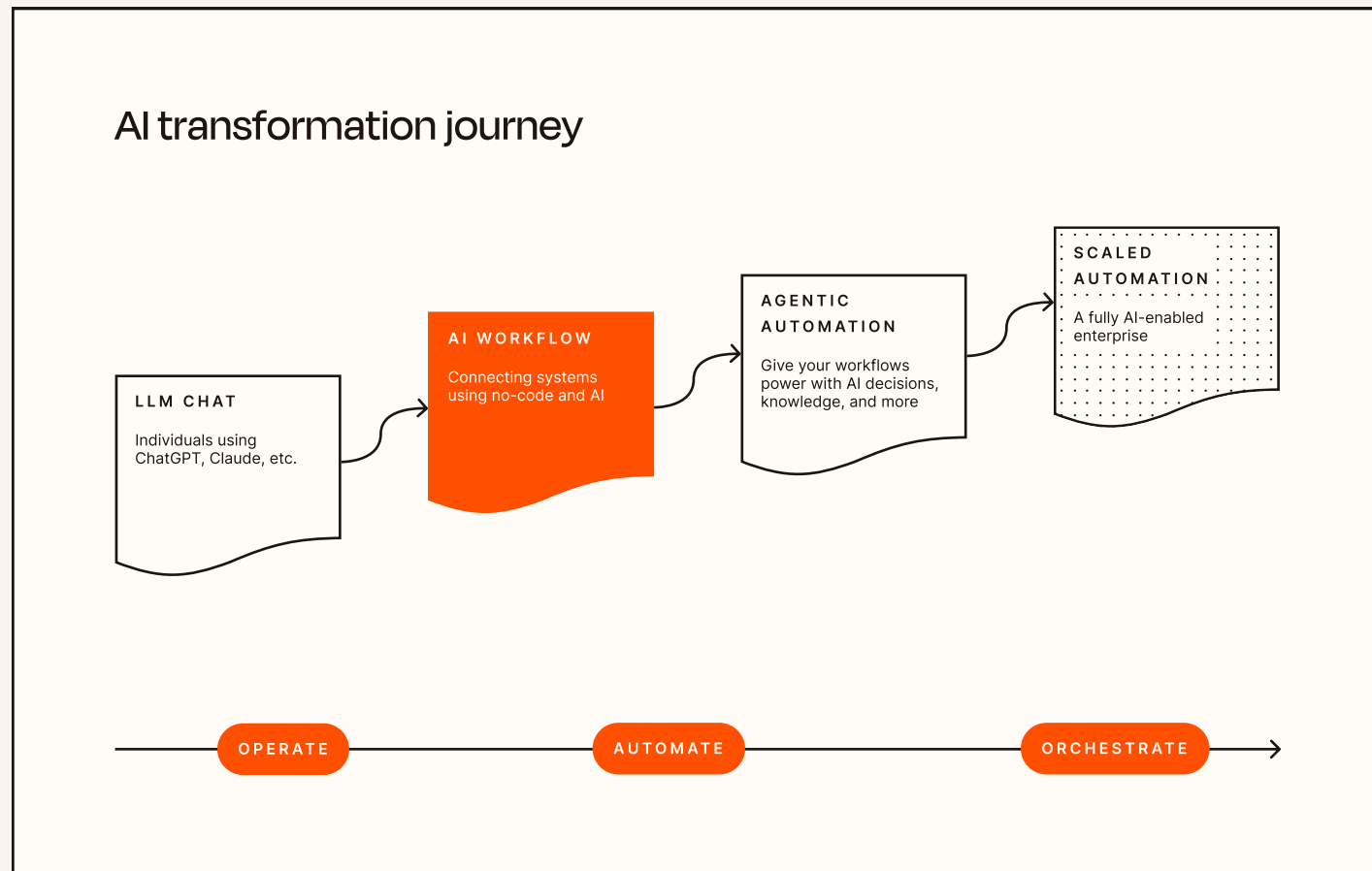
— Eric Mistry, Strategy and Shared Services Operations Manager, Contentsquare



# AI can't scale without automation —or orchestration

Most companies start their AI journey the same way: experimentation.

Teams try out large language models to see what's possible and explore capabilities. But while these tools are powerful on their own, they rarely move beyond one-off use cases.



To scale AI—and get real business impact—you need to evolve past experimentation and move toward automation and beyond. That happens in stages:

### Stage 1: Large language models

Teams experiment with tools like ChatGPT, Claude, or Gemini to carry out research or write content.

This is useful, but disconnected to your data and the rest of your systems.

### Stage 2: AI-powered workflows

Teams start connecting AI tools with no-code platforms and automating workflows (like summarizing content, classifying data, or enriching records leads—triggered automatically).

This is automation: using AI to enhance repeatable tasks inside your systems.

### Stage 3: Agentic workflows and MCP (model context protocol)

Agents don't just enhance—they act. Agents evaluate your business data, get the context they need to make decisions, and take real action across your tech stack with minimal human input.

This is a turning point: from task automation to agentic systems that respond, adapt, and operate across your tech stack from one platform—on demand or automatically.

### Stage 4: Scaled orchestration

AI is no longer a layer—it's fully embedded. It connects across your tech stack, flows through your workflows, and is governed by policy. It supports both operations and strategy.

## This is orchestration

Where AI, people, tools, and logic are all aligned—and scale becomes reality.

Is your company AI ready? [Take our quiz](#) to discover where your company stands on the path to AI adoption—and uncover ways to to upgrade your AI strategy.

**(posh)**

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Automation has allowed us to automate a significant portion of workflows, reducing the need for human touch points by about 80%. In a ten-step process, only two steps might require human intervention. With AI, you can eliminate even those two steps by using tools like OpenAI to generate the necessary content. This enables the creation of systems with no human touchpoints, delivering results autonomously. Internally, you can continually refine and improve these processes without oversight.

— [Owen Colwell](#), former VP of Growth, Posh  
Now Senior RevOps Manager at Chargeflow



## The takeaway?

While **automation** handles single tasks, **orchestration** connects multiple workflows into intelligent “superflows” that work together across your entire business. AI orchestration transforms scattered AI capabilities into cohesive systems that unlock true scale.

And IT leads that progression—by providing the structure, governance, and systems that bring everything together.



Want to turn AI into action? Forward-thinking IT leaders trust Zapier.

For 10+ years, startups and global enterprises alike have relied on Zapier for more reliable workflow automation.



Zapier gives Ops teams the freedom to deploy production-ready AI workflows, and IT teams the visibility to govern—all from one unified platform.

With Zapier, you can:

- **Bring the power of AI into any workflow:** Seamlessly connect top AI models like ChatGPT and Claude to the tools your teams already use.
- **Generate perfect content with AI:** Let AI create emails, summaries, and responses, using expert templates or custom prompts.
- **Automate complex decision-making:** Build AI agents that act on your data, making smart decisions and automating actions across apps.
- **Convert conversations into business results:** Turn chats into conversations with AI chatbots that engage customers and capture qualified leads.

From AI products like Agents and Chatbots to more than 300 AI app integrations (including Azure OpenAI and Google Vertex AI), you can bring innovative ideas to life and scale your impact on IT operations. [Explore our AI guide to learn how.](#)

# Why Zapier is built for enterprise AI orchestration:

## Connect every app, AI model, and workflow

Securely integrate with thousands of tools using advanced authentication and data handling.

## Deploy intelligent systems across the org

Connect AI to the real workflows your teams rely on—sales, support, IT, ops, marketing, and more.

## Automate complex workflows with ease

Build, test, and scale AI-driven systems using no-code, low-code, or full-code—whatever your teams need.

## Control AI at scale with IT-grade governance

Prevent shadow AI, enforce permissions, and keep AI use auditable, visible, and compliant.

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Learn why the world's leading businesses trust Zapier



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