

FREE GUIDE

# THE **AI** PLAYBOOK

Tools and workflows for running a one-person agency.  
No theory. No hype. Just what works.

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`$ cat playbook.md`

# Why I Wrote This

I spent 25 years in digital marketing — agencies, in-house teams, consulting. I've watched the industry cycle through every buzzword from "growth hacking" to "Web3." Most of it was noise. AI is not noise.

In 2024, I rebuilt my entire operation around AI tools. Not as an experiment — as a survival strategy. The agencies I competed against had 10-person teams. I had a laptop and a handful of API keys.

Within months, I was outproducing teams five times my size. Blog posts that used to take two days took two hours. Lead research that required a dedicated VA happened in minutes. Social media that used to be an afterthought became a machine.

**This playbook is the system I actually use.** Not a theoretical framework. Not a list of "top 10 AI tools." These are the specific tools, workflows, and configurations that run my business every day.

I'm sharing it because I believe the biggest advantage small businesses have right now is speed of AI adoption. The enterprises are stuck in procurement cycles and committee meetings. You can implement this stuff today.

## WHO THIS IS FOR

Small business owners, solopreneurs, freelancers, and lean marketing teams who want to do more with less — without hiring an agency or learning to code.

# The One-Person Agency Stack

You don't need 20 tools. You need five categories covered, each doing one job well. Here's the full stack, from the AI brain to the last mile of execution.

## AI BRAIN

### Claude + ChatGPT

Strategy, writing, analysis, coding. Claude for long-form and nuanced work. ChatGPT for quick tasks and image generation.

\$20/mo each

## AUTOMATION

### n8n

Self-hosted workflow automation. Connects everything. Replaces Zapier at a fraction of the cost with no task limits.

~\$10/mo (self-hosted)

## DATA HUB

### Airtable

Your single source of truth. Content calendars, lead databases, project tracking. Structured data with a spreadsheet interface.

Free – \$20/mo

## PUBLISHING

### WordPress + WooCommerce

Your website, blog, and store. Full REST API for automation. Thousands of plugins. You own everything.

\$5–30/mo (hosting)

## TOTAL MONTHLY COST

The core stack runs between **\$55 and \$80/month**. That replaces what agencies charge \$3,000–\$10,000/month to deliver. The ROI isn't marginal — it's a category shift.

# Blog Posts in 2 Hours, Not 2 Days

Content is the engine that drives inbound leads. But most small businesses can't afford to publish consistently. AI changes the math — not by lowering quality, but by eliminating the busywork.

## The Blog Production Workflow

- 1 Keyword Research** — Use a tool like DataForSEO or Ahrefs to find keywords with decent volume (500+/mo) and low competition. Target questions your customers actually ask.
- 2 Competitive Analysis** — Read the top 5 results for your keyword. Note what they cover, what they miss, and how you can be genuinely better. AI can summarize these for you in seconds.
- 3 Outline & Draft** — Give Claude or ChatGPT the keyword, competitive intel, and your unique angle. Have it produce a structured outline first, then expand each section. Edit for your voice.
- 4 Images** — Generate custom images with Flux, Ideogram, or DALL-E. No more hunting stock photos. Each image matches your content exactly.
- 5 SEO & Publish** — Set your meta title, description, focus keyword, and alt text. Publish to WordPress. Your blog post is live, optimized, and didn't cost you a writer's retainer.

### THE OLD WAY

- Hire a writer (\$200-500/post)
- 2-5 day turnaround
- Revisions back and forth
- Generic stock photos
- Maybe 2 posts/month

### THE AI WAY

- You + Claude (\$20/mo)
- 2-hour turnaround
- Your voice from the start
- Custom AI images
- 8-12 posts/month

# 10 Platforms, One Workflow

Most small businesses pick one or two platforms and ignore the rest. That's leaving reach on the table. With the right system, you can publish to every platform simultaneously — with platform-native formatting.

## The Repurposing Framework

Every piece of content starts as one thing (usually a blog post) and becomes many things. A single 2,000-word blog post can generate:

- **5-8 social posts** — Key takeaways rewritten for each platform's tone
- **1 email newsletter** — Summary with a link back to the full post
- **1 LinkedIn article** — Professional angle on the same topic
- **3-5 short-form videos** — Key points as talking-head clips or animated text
- **1 Twitter/X thread** — Step-by-step breakdown of the core idea

## Platform-Specific Formatting

The key is that AI understands platform conventions. You don't post the same text everywhere. Ask Claude to reformat your core message for each platform:

PLATFORM	FORMAT	BEST PRACTICE
<b>LinkedIn</b>	Professional story or insight	Hook in first line. Line breaks for readability. 1,300 chars max.
<b>Twitter/X</b>	Punchy single tweet or thread	Lead with the takeaway. Threads for depth. 280 chars/tweet.
<b>Instagram</b>	Carousel or visual + caption	Visual-first. Hashtags in first comment. 5-10 relevant tags.
<b>Facebook</b>	Story-driven post	Conversational tone. Questions drive engagement.
<b>Threads</b>	Casual take or hot take	Less polished, more authentic. Conversational wins.

I use **Metricool** to schedule posts across all platforms from one dashboard. It handles posting times, analytics, and even comment monitoring. One login, 10 platforms.

# AI Images That Don't Look AI-Generated

Stock photos are dead. Your audience can spot a Shutterstock image from a mile away. AI image generation gives you custom visuals that match your brand — in seconds, not hours.

## Choosing the Right Model

Different AI image models excel at different things. Using the wrong one is why most AI images look terrible. Here's what I use and when:

MODEL	BEST FOR	AVOID FOR
<b>Flux Pro</b>	Photorealistic scenes, products, hero images	Text in images
<b>Ideogram V3</b>	Images with text, banners, social graphics	Photo realism
<b>GPT Image</b>	Complex instructions, transparent backgrounds	Wide aspect ratios
<b>DALL-E / Midjourney</b>	Artistic/stylized images, concepts	Precise details

## The Prompt Framework

Bad prompts make bad images. Good prompts follow a structure:

```
# The formula:  
[Subject] + [Setting/Context] + [Style] + [Lighting] + [Details]  
  
# Bad prompt:  
"A business person using a computer"  
  
# Good prompt:  
"A focused small business owner working at a minimalist  
desk with a laptop, modern home office with natural  
light streaming through a window, warm color palette,  
shallow depth of field, editorial photography style"
```

**Always specify what you don't want.** Add negative details: "no text overlays, no watermarks, no cluttered backgrounds." This prevents the most common AI image failures.

# Finding Customers While You Sleep

Inbound content brings leads to you. But if you want to accelerate growth, you need outbound too. AI makes prospecting — traditionally the most time-consuming part of sales — almost effortless.

## The Outbound Pipeline

### From Zero to Inbox in 4 Steps

- 1 Identify your ideal customer** — Industry, company size, job title, geography. Be specific. "Small business owners" is too broad. "Chiropractors in Texas with no website" is a target.
- 2 Scrape leads at scale** — Tools like Apify or PhantomBuster can pull business data from Google Maps, LinkedIn, or industry directories. 1,000 leads in minutes, not months.
- 3 Verify emails** — Never send to unverified lists. Use Million Verifier or NeverBounce to clean your list. This protects your sender reputation and keeps you out of spam.
- 4 Send personalized sequences** — Tools like Instantly.ai or Smartlead let you send cold email sequences that feel personal. AI writes the variations. The tool handles the delivery.

## Inbound + Outbound = Compounding Growth

The real power is when both systems run simultaneously. Your blog posts and social media build authority and drive inbound leads. Your outbound campaigns reach people who haven't found you yet. Over time, your outbound prospects see your content and convert faster because they already recognize you.

**7,000+**

LEADS SCRAPED IN ONE  
CAMPAIGN

**43%**

HAD VALID EMAIL  
ADDRESSES

**\$0.003**

COST PER VERIFIED LEAD

# Connect Everything. Touch Nothing.

The individual tools are powerful. But the real leverage comes when they talk to each other. Automation is the invisible infrastructure that makes a one-person operation feel like a full team.

## n8n: The Automation Engine

Most people know Zapier. It's fine for simple automations, but it charges per task and gets expensive fast. **n8n is the open-source alternative** — self-hosted, no task limits, and far more powerful. You can run it on a \$5/month server and automate everything.

## Automations I Run Daily

AUTOMATION	TRIGGER	WHAT HAPPENS
<b>Image Generation</b>	Webhook call	AI generates image → uploads to cloud storage → logs to Airtable → returns URL
<b>New Lead Processing</b>	New Airtable record	Verifies email → enriches data → adds to email sequence
<b>Blog to Social</b>	New WP post	Generates platform-specific posts → schedules across channels
<b>Email Monitoring</b>	Gmail filter	Categorizes incoming mail → creates tasks → drafts replies

### THE 80/20 OF AUTOMATION

Start with the task you do most often and hate the most. Automate that one thing first. For most people, it's data entry — copying information from one place to another. That's exactly what automation tools were built for.

## Airtable as Your Hub

Every automation needs a central database. Airtable is the single source of truth — content calendars, lead lists, campaign tracking, product catalogs. When everything writes to and reads from one place, nothing falls through the cracks.

Think of it as your business's operating system. AI tools are the apps. n8n is the connectivity layer. Airtable is the database that ties it all together.

# Rank for Keywords That Actually Convert

SEO isn't dead — it just changed. AI tools let you do keyword research, competitive analysis, and content optimization that used to require an expensive agency or months of learning. The key is targeting the right keywords, not the most popular ones.

## The Keyword Selection Framework

Most beginners target high-volume keywords and wonder why they can't rank. The smart play is finding keywords where:

- **Search volume is 200-2,000/month** — Enough traffic to matter, not so competitive you can't win
- **Difficulty score is under 40** — You can realistically rank in the top 10 within 3-6 months
- **Intent is commercial or transactional** — The searcher is looking to buy, hire, or solve a problem
- **Your expertise is relevant** — You can write something genuinely better than what currently ranks

## The Content Cluster Strategy

Don't write random blog posts. Build **topic clusters** — a pillar page covering a broad topic, supported by 5-10 related posts that link back to it. This signals topical authority to Google.

### Example Cluster: "AI for Small Business"

**P** **Pillar:** "The Complete Guide to AI for Small Business" (3,000+ words)

**1** "Best AI Tools for Small Business" (tool comparison)

**2** "How to Use ChatGPT for Marketing" (tutorial)

**3** "AI Email Marketing for Beginners" (specific use case)



4 "AI vs. Hiring a Marketing Agency" (comparison/decision)

5 "Small Business AI Case Studies" (social proof)

#### AI ADVANTAGE

Use Claude or ChatGPT to analyze the top-ranking content for any keyword. Ask it to identify gaps — what's missing, what's outdated, what's poorly explained. Then write the post that fills those gaps. That's how you outrank established sites.

# Your List Is Your Most Valuable Asset

Social media algorithms change. Google updates its ranking factors. But your email list? That's yours. It's the one channel where you have direct, unfiltered access to your audience.

## The Email System

You don't need Mailchimp at \$300/month. A self-hosted solution like **FluentCRM** (WordPress plugin) or **Sendy** (Amazon SES) gives you full email marketing capabilities for a fraction of the cost.

TOOL	COST	BEST FOR
<b>FluentCRM</b>	\$103/year	WordPress-native. CRM + automation + email. One-time annual fee.
<b>Sendy</b>	\$69 one-time + SES costs	High volume. Send 100K emails for ~\$10. Best for large lists.
<b>Mailchimp</b>	\$13-350/mo	Easiest to use. Gets expensive fast. Good for beginners.

## The Welcome Sequence

When someone subscribes, they're at peak interest. Don't waste it. A 5-email welcome sequence builds the relationship:

### 5-Email Welcome Sequence

- 1 Day 0 — Deliver the goods.** Thank them, deliver whatever they signed up for, set expectations for future emails.
- 2 Day 2 — Your story.** Who you are, why you do this, what makes your approach different. Build connection.
- 3 Day 4 — Quick win.** Share one actionable tip they can implement in 15 minutes. Prove your value.

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**Day 7 — Case study.** Show a real example of your work. Results, before/after, specific numbers.

**5 Day 10 — The ask.** Invite them to take the next step. Book a call, check out a service, reply with their biggest challenge.

#### AI-POWERED EMAILS

Use Claude to draft your entire welcome sequence. Give it your brand voice, your story, and your offer. It will generate 5 emails in minutes. Then edit for authenticity — the AI handles structure, you add the soul.

# Your First Week Action Plan

Don't try to implement everything at once. Here's the exact sequence I'd follow if I were starting from scratch today. One week. Seven steps. A working system by Friday.

## Day 1: Set Up Your AI Tools

Sign up for Claude Pro (\$20/mo). This is your primary AI assistant for writing, strategy, and analysis. If you already use ChatGPT, keep it — they complement each other. Get comfortable with the chat interface. Try asking it to write a social media post about your business.

## Day 2: Create Your Content Hub

Set up an Airtable base with three tables: Content Calendar, Lead Tracker, and Ideas. This takes 20 minutes and becomes the command center for everything. Every piece of content, every lead, every idea goes here.

## Day 3: Publish Your First AI-Assisted Blog Post

Pick a question your customers ask constantly. Use Claude to research, outline, and draft a 1,500-word answer. Edit it in your voice. Generate a custom image. Publish to WordPress. You just created content that would have taken a freelancer a week.

## Day 4: Set Up Social Distribution

Take yesterday's blog post and ask Claude to create posts for LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Sign up for Metricool (free tier works). Schedule all four posts. Your blog content now reaches four platforms automatically.

## Day 5: Build Your Email Capture

Install FluentCRM on your WordPress site. Create a simple signup form. Write a lead magnet (use AI — a checklist, template, or short guide). Add the form to your blog sidebar and post footer. You're now building a list.

## Day 6: Your First Automation

Connect one thing to another. The simplest: when someone subscribes to your email list, automatically add them to your Airtable Lead Tracker. Use n8n, Zapier, or even FluentCRM's built-in automations.

## Day 7: Review and Plan

Look at what you built this week. You have: an AI workflow, a content hub, a published blog post, social media presence, email capture, and your first automation. Plan next week's content. You're operational.

# Mistakes That Will Cost You Time

I've made every mistake in this list. Learn from mine so you can make new, more interesting mistakes of your own.

## 1. Publishing AI Content Without Editing

AI drafts are starting points, not finished products. Every piece of content needs your expertise, your examples, your voice. The businesses that publish raw AI output are building a house on sand. Google knows. Your audience knows.

## 2. Chasing Tools Instead of Systems

There's a new AI tool every day. Ignore 95% of them. Pick your stack, learn it deeply, and build systems that compound. Switching tools every month means you never get past the setup phase.

## 3. Automating Before Understanding

Don't automate a process you haven't done manually at least 10 times. You need to understand the edge cases, the failures, the nuances before you can build a reliable automation. Automate what works, not what you hope will work.

## 4. Ignoring Email for Social Media

Social media is rented land. Your Instagram reach can drop 80% overnight because of an algorithm change. Email is owned land. Build your list from day one, even if it grows slowly.

## 5. Trying to Do Everything at Once

The stack I described took months to build. Don't try to set up blog production, social media, lead gen, email marketing, and automation in one weekend. Pick one workflow. Master it. Add the next one.

## 6. Skipping SEO Fundamentals

AI can write beautiful content, but if you're targeting keywords nobody searches for — or keywords you can't possibly rank for — it doesn't matter. Spend 30 minutes on keyword research before every blog post. It's the highest-ROI time investment in content marketing.

## THE META-LESSON

AI doesn't replace strategy. It replaces execution. You still need to know what to do — AI just makes the doing dramatically faster. Invest in understanding marketing fundamentals. The AI handles the rest.

## RESOURCES

# Your Toolkit

Everything referenced in this playbook, organized for quick access. Bookmark this page.

## AI Assistants

TOOL	USE	COST
<b>Claude Pro</b>	Writing, analysis, strategy, coding	\$20/mo
<b>ChatGPT Plus</b>	Quick tasks, image generation, GPTs	\$20/mo

## Content & Publishing

TOOL	USE	COST
<b>WordPress</b>	Website, blog, pages	Hosting: \$5-30/mo
<b>Rank Math</b>	SEO optimization	Free / \$59/yr
<b>Flux Pro / Ideogram</b>	AI image generation	Pay per image

## Marketing & Distribution

TOOL	USE	COST
<b>Metricool</b>	Social media scheduling	Free - \$25/mo
<b>FluentCRM</b>	Email CRM & automation	\$103/yr
<b>Airtable</b>	Data hub & content calendar	Free - \$20/mo

## Automation & Data

TOOL	USE	COST
<b>n8n</b>	Workflow automation	~\$10/mo (self-hosted)

TOOL	USE	COST
<b>Apify</b>	Web scraping & lead gen	\$49/mo
<b>Million Verifier</b>	Email verification	\$37/10K emails

Thanks for reading. Now go build something.

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