
THE FREE AI AUDIT

10 things every business should know **before** automating with AI.

A no-nonsense guide from Key's Touch — the AI automation team that builds, ships, and hands you the keys.

Inside: 10 lessons · ROI math · what to ignore · the audit checklist we use on every client.

Why this guide exists.

Most companies don't have an AI problem. They have a workflow problem with an AI-shaped solution. The difference matters: a workflow problem can be measured, scoped, and shipped in weeks. An "AI problem" becomes a 9-month consulting engagement that ends with a slide deck and no working software.

This is the same audit framework we walk every Key's Touch client through on day one. It cuts through vendor pitches, model hype, and roadmap theater so you can ask sharper questions, scope tighter projects, and ship things that actually save you hours every week.

Read it once. Use it twice — first when you're picking what to automate, second when you're vetting whoever you hire to build it. If a vendor flunks more than two of the ten, walk.

How to read this: each item is one principle, one explanation, one takeaway. Skim the headlines first. Then come back to whichever ones surprised you.

01

START WITH THE PROBLEM, NOT THE TOOL
AI is a tool. It's not a strategy.

The fastest way to waste a six-figure budget is to start with "we should use AI" instead of "this workflow is bleeding 12 hours a week." Map the pain first. Quantify the cost. Then ask what tool fits — and accept that sometimes the answer isn't AI at all. A clean Zapier flow or a SQL view often beats a fine-tuned model for half the cost and 10x the reliability.

Takeaway: the right project is the one with the most hours wasted per week, not the one with the most buzzword potential.

02

THE HIDDEN TAX**Most teams lose 6+ hours per employee per week to automatable work.**

Copy-pasting data between tools. Reformatting reports. Chasing status updates in Slack. Manually generating the same Monday recap. Across a 10-person team at \$50/hr, that's roughly \$156,000 a year of wages spent on work software should already do. Most owners feel the drag but never put a number on it. Numbers turn "someday" into a budget.

Takeaway: run the math: employees × hours/week wasted × hourly cost × 50 weeks. That number is your automation budget ceiling.

03

MODEL SELECTION

The right AI isn't always GPT-4 (or even AI).

GPT-4, Claude, open-source Llama, a fine-tuned classifier, a regex, a rule-based workflow — they're all in the toolbox. Trendy doesn't mean correct. We've replaced "AI agents" with 12 lines of Python and watched accuracy go from 84% to 99%. Pick the simplest tool that solves the problem at the required reliability level.

Takeaway: ask your vendor to defend why the model they picked beats a simpler alternative. If they can't, walk.

04

OWNERSHIP

Own the code, the data, and the integrations.

Vendor lock-in is the silent killer of automation ROI. If your "AI assistant" lives entirely inside someone else's platform — proprietary prompts, proprietary memory, proprietary connectors — you don't own a system, you rent one. When the vendor raises prices or pivots, your operations are the hostage. Insist on source code, documentation, and exportable data from day one.

Takeaway: if you can't take it with you when you leave, you don't actually own it.

05

TIME TO VALUE

First value in 4 weeks. Not a 6-month discovery phase.

Long discovery phases are how agencies bill without shipping. The right team can audit your ops in a week, design the system in week 2, and have a working automation deployed by week 4. Maybe it only handles 60% of the workflow at first — that's fine. 60% live and learning beats 100% on a slide deck.

Takeaway: if your vendor needs more than 4 weeks before showing working software, you're paying for their meetings.

06

AUDIT BEFORE BUYING**Audit your operations before you buy a single tool.**

Tools sold without context become shelfware. A real audit asks: which workflows touch the most people? Which generate the most rework? Where do mistakes cost real money? The output is a ranked list of automation candidates with estimated time saved, complexity, and ROI. That's the only document worth starting from.

Takeaway: the audit costs you 30 minutes. Tool sprawl without one costs you a year.

07

MEASURE BY MATH**Calculate ROI per workflow — not per project.**

A "good" automation project rolls up dozens of small wins and losses. Track each workflow separately: hours saved per week, errors prevented per month, response-time improvement, customer-impact deltas. Some workflows pay back in a week; others never do. You can only double down on what works if you measure what works.

Takeaway: every automation needs a single number it lives or dies by. Define it before launch.

08

WHAT TO AUTOMATE**Automate the tedious. Keep humans on judgment.**

AI is excellent at high-volume, low-context tasks: extraction, classification, summarization, routing, formatting. It's poor at rare decisions with high downside: hiring, pricing exceptions, customer escalations, strategic tradeoffs. The win is not "replace humans with AI." The win is "hand the boring 80% to AI so humans can focus on the 20% that actually requires them."

Takeaway: if a task requires reading the room, keep it with a human. If it requires reading 200 emails, hand it to AI.

09

GUARDRAILS**Every automation needs a kill switch and a measurable success metric.**

Set a target before you build: "reduce ticket triage time from 6 minutes to 90 seconds with >95% accuracy." Build observability in from day one — logs, error alerts, accuracy sampling, human-in-the-loop fallbacks. The teams that ship reliable AI aren't the ones with the smartest models. They're the ones who can answer "is it working right now?" in under 30 seconds.

Takeaway: if you can't measure it live and pause it instantly, you don't have an automation — you have a liability.

10

WHERE TO START**Pick the workflow with the highest pain × frequency score.**

Score every candidate workflow on two axes: how painful is it (hours, errors, customer impact) and how often does it happen (daily, weekly, monthly). Multiply. Start with the highest score. It will almost never be the workflow that excites your team the most. It will almost always be the boring repetitive one nobody wants to talk about. That's the point.

Takeaway: the most boring workflow in your business is usually where the biggest ROI lives.

Want this run on **your** business?

The Key's Touch Free AI Audit is 30 minutes, zero pitch deck, zero pressure. We map your operations, find the biggest automation wins, and send you a one-page report with estimated hours saved per workflow — whether you hire us or not.

Book the free audit:

keystouch.com · email **key@keystouch.com**

*You own everything we build. Full source code, documentation, and knowledge transfer.
No vendor lock-in. No hostage situations.*