

NETWEBMEDIA AI SERIES · 14 INDUSTRIES

AI and Local Services

Gyms, boutiques, pet services, cleaners, tutors and the neighborhood shop: how to use AI to be found, answer fast and keep customers.

GYMS

LOCAL RETAIL

PET SERVICES

CLEANING

TUTORING

First edition · September 2026

Book 5 of 14 · netwebmedia.com

About this series

Fourteen books, one question: what does AI actually change for a business like yours? Each book is written for one industry — its customers, its tools, its rules — so you can act on it this month, not someday. Buy one, or get all fourteen in the bundle.

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| 3. AI and Hospitality & Tourism | 10. AI and Wine & Agriculture |
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Every statistic in this book carries a numbered reference to a named, dated source in the Sources section. Benchmarks are medians or averages from other businesses as published by those sources — not predictions of your results.

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Start here

This book is for the people who actually run local service businesses: the owner of a 400-member gym who also teaches the 6 am class, the yoga studio with two rooms and a waitlist problem, the boutique on the corner that competes on taste and service, the groomer with a van and a phone full of doodle photos, the cleaning company with nine crews and one dispatcher, the tutoring centre where every parent wants a progress note by Friday. If your customers walk, drive or bring their dog to you, this is written for you.

It is not a book about the future of AI. It is a book about the next thirty days. Every chapter ends in something you can do this week, and every number in it comes from a named, dated source you can check in the Sources section.

Here is what you get. Chapter 1 shows where your peers already are, with the adoption data from Intuit, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the fitness, retail and home-service surveys of 2025 and 2026. Chapter 2 explains, in plain English, the five jobs AI can do in a local business and the ones it cannot. Chapter 3 is about your customers: how they now ask ChatGPT for "a good dog groomer near me" before they call you, and what the new review thresholds mean. Chapter 4 ranks the ten use cases that pay back fastest. Chapter 5 gives you a tool stack with real September 2026 prices, in three budgets. Chapter 6 covers the rules: the FTC's review rule, the texting rules, Colorado's AI law, the EU's disclosure duty and Chile's Ley 21.719. Chapter 7 is the 30-day plan. Chapter 8 is for readers in Chile and the rest of Latin America.

You can read it front to back in about forty minutes. If you are short on time, read Chapter 4 and Chapter 7 and come back for the rest.

Local services and AI in 2026 — four numbers to know

45%

of consumers used ChatGPT or another AI tool to find a local business in the past year, up from 6%

77%

of US small and mid-sized businesses now use AI regularly

68%

of consumers will only use a local business rated 4 stars or higher

20%

of service businesses reply to a lead within the hour that 55% of customers expect

Sources: BrightLocal, 2026; Intuit QuickBooks, 2026 (vendor survey); Jobber, 2026 (vendor survey)

The pattern those four numbers describe is the whole story of this book. Your customers have already moved: almost half now ask an AI tool who to hire, and two-thirds will not consider you below four stars. Your peers have moved too. But the job that pays back fastest, answering the customer within the hour, is still done by only one business in five. The owner who uses AI for that job, with a person still in charge, gets an advantage that is growing, not shrinking.

1. Why AI matters for local services now

A big market where nobody is big

Local services are the most fragmented corner of the economy. There are 36.2 million small businesses in the United States; they account for nearly 46% of private-sector employment and roughly nine of every ten net new jobs created between March 2023 and March 2024.¹ Almost none has a marketing department, and all of them compete on the same three things: being found, answering fast and being trusted.

The demand side is healthy. 81 million Americans held a fitness-facility membership in 2025, 26.1% of the population aged six and over and 5.2% more than in 2024; facilities logged 7 billion visits, above the 2019 peak, and the 65-and-over group is growing fastest at 8.6% a year.² US pet spending reached \$158 billion in 2025 and is forecast at \$165 billion for 2026; 95 million households own a pet.³ Grooming and boarding alone is a \$15.4 billion industry with roughly 193,000 businesses.⁴ Among small retailers with fewer than 16 stores, 94% rate business health "good or excellent" and 73% grew both revenue and profit.⁵

Where your peers are

Adoption is no longer the question. Intuit's 2026 report, built on more than 34,000 surveys and 5.3 million anonymized QuickBooks accounts, found that 77% of US small and mid-sized businesses now use AI regularly. Of those users, 78% say it improved productivity (up from 46% in July 2024), 43% credit AI with revenue gains against 2% reporting declines, 29% report lower costs against 17% higher, and 27% say their workday got shorter. Businesses are four times more likely to say AI increased headcount than decreased it: 17% versus 4%.⁸

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce sees the same trend: 58% of small businesses used generative AI in 2025, up from 40% in 2024, and 82% of AI-using small businesses grew their workforce.⁹ In the cleaning and home-service trades, 52% of owners use AI in daily operations and 27% plan to within a year; the top uses are quoting (54%), invoicing (52%) and business writing (51%).¹¹ Among small retailers, 90% are experimenting with AI, 90% plan to increase their use and 92% call it "great value for the money"; the top uses are decision-making (42%), staff productivity (40%) and marketing (39%).⁵

AI adoption across local-service segments, 2025–2026



Sources: Toast via Chain Store Age, 2026 (vendor survey); Intuit QuickBooks, 2026 (vendor survey); U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2025; Jobber, 2026 (vendor survey)

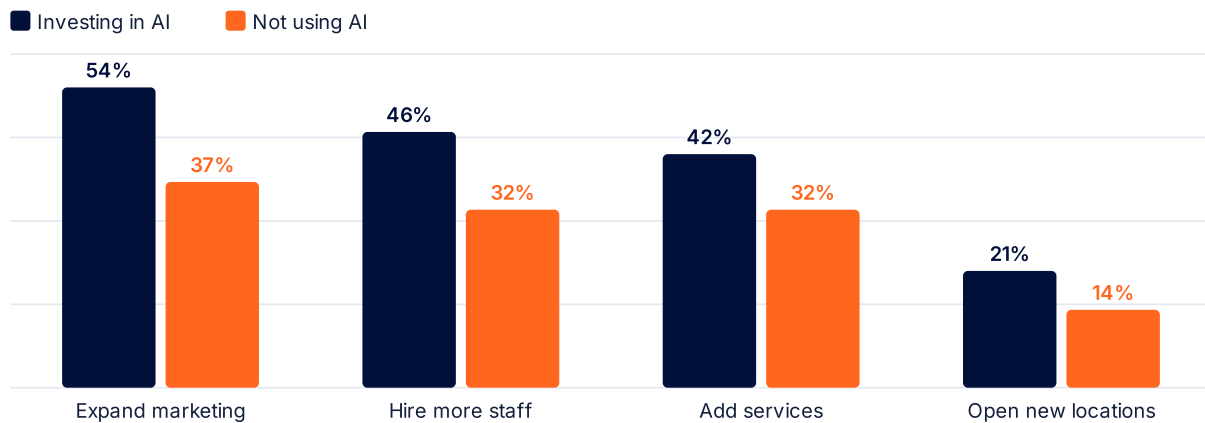
Notice the highlighted bar. Trades that quote, schedule and invoice by hand have the most room left, and the uses they report (quoting, invoicing, writing) are the simplest to copy.

Key number: 88% of home-service businesses that describe themselves as highly confident about the year ahead use AI, against 27% of their low-confidence peers.¹¹ The direction of cause is debatable; the correlation is not.

Adopters and non-adopters plan different years

The fitness industry has the clearest adopter-versus-non-adopter data. Mindbody's 2025 survey of more than 1,400 decision-makers found operators investing in AI markedly more expansionary: 54% plan to expand marketing (against 37%), 46% expect to hire more staff (against 32%), 42% will add services (against 32%) and 21% plan new locations (against 14%). Only 4% cut staff because of AI.¹⁰

Fitness operators: AI investors vs. non-users, plans for the year ahead



Source: Mindbody, 2025 State of the Industry Report, 2025 (vendor survey)

The gap between using and benefiting

Using AI and getting a result from it are different things, and in local services the gap has a specific shape: the customer is ahead of the counter. ABC Fitness, working from a 40-million-member dataset, reports that 80% of people who use AI fitness tools engage with them daily or weekly and 90% say the tools help them stay consistent, while the same company's operator data show AI is still mostly on the member's phone, not at the front desk.¹²

What "at the front desk" looks like shows up in vendor case data. Local businesses running Podium's AI agents report a 45% lift in lead conversion and roughly 30% higher revenue, with replies in under a minute where a human typically takes two hours or more.¹³ Treat those figures as what a vendor reports about its best customers, not as your forecast. The mechanism is not in dispute: the business that answers first gets the booking.

The barriers are the usual ones: privacy and security (36%), not knowing what AI can do (28%) and worry about accuracy, bias or errors (26%).⁸ Chapters 2, 5 and 6 are written to remove each of them.