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Adapt or Die: AI, Your Partner In Business

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We were recently talking to a client about trading patterns in 2025 in the different categories. This client has a restaurant. He mentioned that he's operated it for many years as a profitable part of the whole business. He worked on the old benchmark rule of 30% of costs were allocated to wages, 30% to food costs, 30% overheads and 10% profit. This worked until 2025. In that year his wage costs became 45%, his food costs were 40%.
We stopped him there.

"So, you're making a loss."

"Yes, this year we will not charge rent to the restaurant."

This isn't the answer when globally wages are going up, as well as the wholesale price of goods; both are out of your hands and won't come down. Not paying the rent, even to yourself isn't acceptable.

An alternative way of doing business is essential.

What's the New Way of Doing Business?
People are the critical element to this industry. We need to keep our best team members and develop them to maximize their effect in the business. There's no longer a place for underperforming team members.

In the days ahead, AI tools trained to replicate routines more efficiently can become your friend and help you shine in business.

One example is stocktaking (inventory control), which is a chore. It employs at least one person counting stock and, if we were honest about it, why waste this labor? Many of our clients use AI in various ways. One talks into his phone and within seconds the phone tells him how much stock he has, how much he needs, when to order it again, when to promote it, what to display next to it and what the average sale is of the items he's selected.
He has more accurate control over his business and has saved at least one, if not two, team members from a mundane job to be able to serve customers. Many POS systems are integrating AI with inventory management.

In preparing this article, we asked Andy Burns, an AI retail consultant from Australia, what he would suggest using AI for in a garden center. These are his 10 ideas:

1. The One-Photo Project Plan: Let AI use a customer's smartphone photo to instantly generate a complete garden design mood board and a precise shopping list for the exact amount of soil, mulch and plants required (neighbobrite.com)
2. The "For You" Garden: Train AI on loyal customer purchase histories to create a personalized "For You" service, recommending plants and products with Netflix-like accuracy. (Klaviyo.com)
3. The Digital Plant Doctor: Install an AI-powered kiosk to support staff by instantly identifying pests and diseases from a customer's photo, allowing your team to provide the perfect solution. (You can find several on Apple or Google Apps.)
4. Future-View Your Garden: Use AI-driven augmented reality to let customers use their phone to see what a tree will look like and how much space it'll fill in their actual garden after 10 years. (Meta Glass and Google Goggles are both working on this.)
5. Dynamic Pricing for Plant Health: Implement AI that draws from stock data, weather reports and other sources to automatically promote plants before they show signs of stress, increasing sales and preventing waste.
6. Answer Real Community Questions: Use AI to analyze local gardening forums to find the specific, unanswered questions your community members are asking and then create content that directly solves their problems.
7. The Expert-Trained Chatbot: Create a 24/7 chatbot trained exclusively on your own horticulturalists' advice, ensuring customers get your expert answers, in your unique voice, even when you're closed.
8. The Internal "Expert in Your Pocket": Build an AI knowledge base that gives junior staff instant, searchable access to your most senior horticulturalists' decades of expertise, empowering them to answer any question with confidence. This is already being developed by big box stores and we need to move quickly on this.
9. Prove Your Green Credentials: Use AI to calculate and display the precise "carbon miles" of your locally sourced plants versus big box competitors, providing tangible proof of your sustainability
10. Data-Driven Staffing: Use predictive AI to optimize staff schedules based on weather, sales trends and local events, ensuring essential plant care is done during the quietest times for zero customer disruption. (There are many available on the internet.)

Bonus Tip—The Neighborhood Ecosystem Advisor: Use AI to map your local ecosystem—by asking for a customer's street and suburb, your AI can recommend plants that create pollinator corridors by complementing what neighbors bought and are already growing, positioning you as the strategic advisor for the entire community's environmental health.

The Message Is Clear

Develop AI-powered customer experiences that save your team time and enhance the customer experience. The consumer wants fast answers, seamless experiences and more value for money. Either your AI will provide a dependable "touchpoint" or someone else will be ahead of you.

While AI is a powerful tool, it is not a panacea. It won't solve all challenges and may, in fact, create new ones. Research carried out by the Australian HR Institute in January 2026 found that companies that frequently used AI reported that 37% of their workforce experienced lower well-being and civility towards colleagues due to the pressure of using this technology.

The solution points to a greater need for management to demonstrate compassion. AI is capable of performing 99% of the cognitive and knowledge work currently done by people. The value jobs that will skyrocket in the future will be those involving hands-on engagement with the physical world: gardening, plumbing, physical therapy and more. And they'll be augmented by use of AI to run the business side of them all.

Remember, our big asset is that we're dealing with NATURE.

Lose that and we lose our market. **GP**

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