

tech-hub

By



Enterprise
Nation

A report for Tech Hub Ireland

Natural fit for business

How Irish entrepreneurs are adopting
artificial intelligence

In partnership with





Foreword

This report reveals that a remarkable number of entrepreneurs are already adopting artificial intelligence (AI), driven not by trends but by practical needs to save time and money. For small business owners, AI has become a powerful tool to speed up everyday tasks, providing essential support when time and resources are tight.

Despite this strong appetite for adoption, the report also highlights a growing gap in skills and confidence. While almost 80% of founders we surveyed are already using AI, many rate their knowledge at just three out of five. Small business owners want more training, better information and financial support to make sure they can get the most out of these tools.

These aren't unreasonable demands, and the industry must be prepared to invest and work with government in public and private partnerships to provide new training programmes designed to introduce small business owners to emerging technology. This kind of collaboration and its core commitments were outlined as part of the forthcoming [Charter for Digital Inclusion](#), which cited Tech Hub as a key example of this emerging digital coalition.

AI has the potential to contribute up to €148 billion to Ireland's annual GDP by 2038 – a 22% increase over the current forecast.

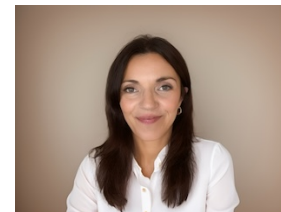
According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for 99.8% of all enterprises in Ireland. Micro-enterprises (fewer than 10 employees) make up a significant percentage operating across sectors including services, construction, distribution and manufacturing, contributing significantly to employment and economic activity.

Digital adoption among these businesses is crucial for maintaining competitiveness and driving growth. According to recent research from Accenture, AI has the potential to contribute up to €148 billion to Ireland's annual GDP by 2038 – a 22% increase over the current forecast. If used effectively, the research says, generative AI could increase Ireland's average annual GDP growth rate for 2023–2038 from the baseline of 2.5% to 3.9%.

While Irish firms have made strides in going digital and adopting technology, clear challenges remain. Studies, including this one, indicate that many small and micro businesses are still in the early stages of their digital transformation. This report finds that factors such as the cost of licences and a lack of digital skills are hindering a deeper and more meaningful adoption of artificial intelligence (AI).

The findings make it abundantly clear – that training and investment are needed if Irish entrepreneurs are going to use AI to its full potential.

This report provides valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders working to advance the aims of the National AI Strategy, Digital Transition Fund and Charter for Digital Inclusion to ensure SMEs can effectively make the most of AI's potential.



Joanne Mangan
Ireland Country Manager
Enterprise Nation



Introduction

This report analyses the findings from a survey conducted by Tech Hub Ireland of Irish small business founders and Enterprise Nation members.

The survey explored how widely this key demographic has adopted AI, looking at rates of use, confidence levels, perceived benefits and any barriers to implementing the technology.

The report also examines demand for government support and people’s preferred methods of learning, with a specific focus on gender and age breakdowns. The findings provide valuable insight into the current state of AI integration among Irish entrepreneurs. They also offer a foundation for targeted policy recommendations that can ultimately help more Irish businesses adopt this transformative technology.



Key findings

AI is here but confidence is lagging

Nearly **80% of small business owners surveyed** say they’re already using AI in some form. This suggests there is a high degree of awareness of AI’s potential, particularly among **female founders** and people aged **46 to 55**, where use is especially strong.

However, when asked to rate their confidence in using AI, most founders scored themselves just **three out of five**. Female founders and older entrepreneurs were more likely to report lower levels of confidence, highlighting a clear **need to develop skills and offer support tailored to specific demographics**.

The appetite for support to improve skills was strong, with 69% saying they wanted access to training and 65% asking for financial support to integrate AI into their systems.

Widespread AI adoption with demographic variations

Many of the founders we surveyed have already adopted AI, which shows they recognise its potential. Notably, **female founders** demonstrate a slightly higher adoption rate (79%) compared to male founders. Adoption is also strong among people aged 46 to 55 (87%) and 56 to 65 (79%*).



79%

more female small business owners are using AI technology for their business



75%

Fig 1. Are you currently using any AI technology?

	Female		Male	Male and female co-founders	Total %
Yes %	79%	30	75%	0%	76%
No %	21%	10	25%	100%	24%
	100%	40	100%	100%	100%

Fig 2. Are you currently using any AI technology?

	18–24	25–35	36–45	46–55	56–65	65+	Total %
Yes %	100%	61%	70%	87%	79%	100%	76%
No %	0%	39%	30%	13%	21%	0%	24%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Case study



How PumpSkynz uses AI to compete globally from a rural farm

When Catherine Devine launched [PumpSkynz](#) – a purpose-led business designing covers for insulin pumps and diabetes devices – she didn't have a team, funding or technical training.

What she had was a deep understanding of her customer, a mission to empower people living with Type 1 diabetes and the resourcefulness to use every tool at her disposal – including AI.

"I run the business from a farm in Donegal," Catherine explains. "And sometimes it really is just me and the laptop. AI has become the business partner I couldn't afford to hire – the strategist, editor, cheerleader and operations assistant all rolled into one."

From drafting product listings and pitch decks to rewriting sensitive customer emails, Catherine uses AI every day – not just to save time, but to stay focused and maintain momentum.

"I use ChatGPT so much I gave it a name – Geoffrey," she laughs. "And while that might sound quirky, it's because this tool genuinely feels like an extension of my team. Geoffrey helps me organise launches, prepare funding proposals, brainstorm content and even rewrite sensitive or difficult communications in a way that reflects my tone and values."

PumpSkynz now exports to 16 countries and is positioning Ireland as a leader in the growing market for diabetes accessories – a remarkable feat for a business operating from a rural location without a full-time team.

Catherine credits AI with making that possible. "AI has completely transformed how I approach copywriting, campaign planning and customer engagement. It's helped me refine my brand voice and consistently show up online even on days when I'm feeling overwhelmed or pulled in too many directions.

"But beyond marketing, I've found AI incredibly valuable as a thinking tool. I use it to structure ideas, break down big decisions and weigh up priorities. I can filter out the noise and focus on what will actually move the business forward."

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It's helped me grow faster, think clearer and spend more time where it counts. And now I'm in a position to build a small team, here in Donegal.

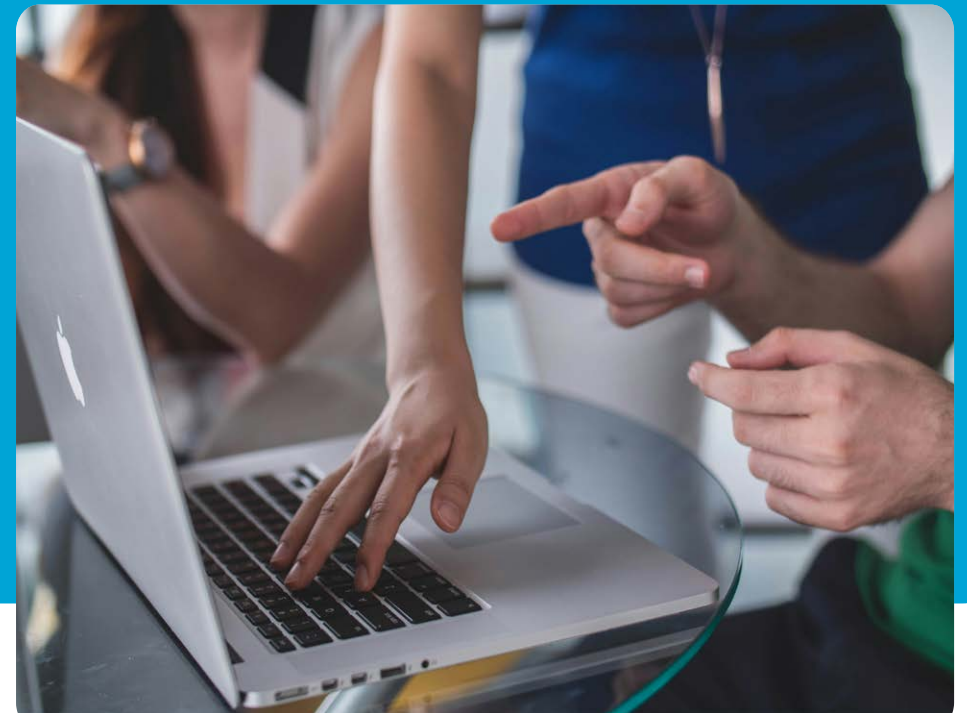
AI as the equaliser

For Catherine, AI isn't a luxury – it's the reason her business has been able to grow. "There's a fear that AI is taking jobs away from real people. But for a business like mine, AI support is actually one of the reasons we're in a position to hire people.

"It's helped me grow faster, think clearer and spend more time where it counts. And now I'm in a position to build a small team, here in Donegal. That isn't job displacement. That's job activation in a place where it wouldn't have happened otherwise."

And the impact extends beyond her own business. "My husband's a farmer and even he now uses ChatGPT every week to research best practices, plan out tasks and solve everyday challenges on the farm.

"It's bringing new thinking into a very traditional sector. That, to me, is the real power of this technology. It's no longer reserved for the tech industry. It's for everyone and it's changing how we operate across the board."



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For me, AI became the cheerleader I couldn't afford. The assistant that never takes a break. The second brain that helped me breathe.

From overwhelm to clarity

Catherine says the biggest initial barrier wasn't money or skills – it was mindset.

"I assumed AI was for people with technical backgrounds, not for someone like me, with a journalism background and no formal tech training. I thought I needed to understand the tech behind it before I could use it, which simply isn't true.

"There was also a fear – of looking stupid, of doing it wrong, of trusting something new. But that fear is keeping a lot of small businesses stuck doing everything the hard way when AI could actually make their lives a lot easier."

That shift from scepticism to confidence has been profound. "Every time it saved me time or helped me get unstuck, it built trust. Now it's part of how I run my business.

"That said, I still feel like I'm only scratching the surface. I know there's much more I could be doing with AI, but I'm learning as I go and using it in a way that feels practical and grounded."

A call for practical, human-led support

Catherine hasn't accessed formal government support for AI yet, but she sees a clear opportunity. "It's a gap that needs addressing. I haven't come across any targeted government support or training around AI that speaks to small product-based businesses like mine. Everything I've learned has come from using the tools, asking questions and learning as I go!

"What would help are practical, industry-specific workshops. Sessions that show real examples of how small businesses in different sectors are using AI to save time, cut costs or reach new customers. Not theory, just real-world applications."

She also believes a national campaign highlighting AI-powered success stories from rural areas could help shift perception. "Above all, we need to shift the narrative. AI isn't just changing how we work, it's changing who can work. It's giving people in remote areas, people with caring responsibilities and people who've been locked out of traditional employment models a real chance to build something of their own.



"I'm living proof. From a farm in Donegal, I've built a brand that's changing the conversation around Type 1 diabetes globally, and AI is a core part of how I've done it. That opportunity should be available to everyone."

What's next?

PumpSkynz is now preparing for expansion and continuing to use AI to scale operations, from customer segmentation to generating ideas for new products.

"Running a business alone is exhausting. You're the head of sales, customer service, content, operations, all while juggling life. And let's be honest: most of us can't afford to hire the support we need.

"For me, AI became the cheerleader I couldn't afford. The assistant that never takes a break. The second brain that helped me breathe."

Her advice to other small business owners? "I know a lot of people, amazing business owners who still don't really know what AI is, or what tools like ChatGPT actually do. They think it's something you need to be trained in. Something for tech people. But I'm here to tell you, it's not. "If you can write an email, you can use AI. If you've ever sat staring at a blank screen wondering how to word something, that's a moment where AI could help you."

Confidence and demographic gaps

While AI adoption is common, confidence in its use varies. **Male founders** exhibit the highest average confidence (3.6 out of 5), while founders aged **46 to 55** show an average confidence level of 3.4*. As the overall average confidence level is 3.2, there is a need to address these gaps, particularly among female founders and certain age groups.

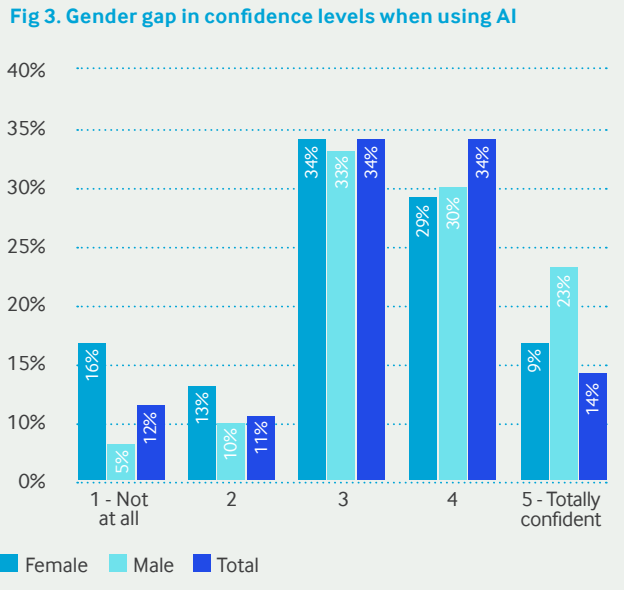
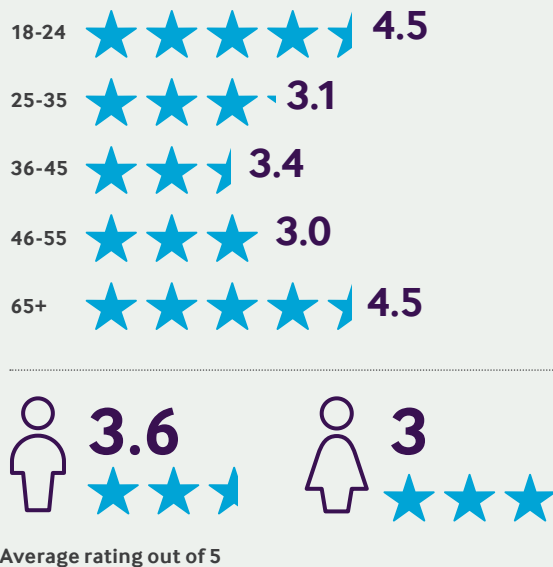


Fig 4. Age gap in confidence levels when using AI



Time-saving as a key driver

The main benefit of AI, cited by 84% of people surveyed, is its ability to save time. Founders aged 45 to 55 (97%) and 56 to 65 (93%) especially value this advantage, which highlights the strong role AI has to play in increasing efficiency for more established businesses.

Fig 5. Perceived benefits of AI – breakdown by gender

	Female	Male	Total %
Saving time and automating tasks	85%	88%	86%
Gaining deeper customer insights	36%	43%	39%
Making better business decisions	44%	53%	48%
Improving marketing and sales campaigns	76%	58%	70%
Other	0%	0%	0%

Fig 6. Which benefit of AI excites you the most in terms of boosting your business?

	18-24	25-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	65+	Total count
Saving time and automating tasks	100%	78%	89%	89%	86%	100%	86%
Gaining deeper customer insights	0%	44%	38%	41%	29%	50%	39%
Making better business decisions	0%	44%	51%	51%	36%	50%	48%
Improving marketing and sales campaigns	50%	56%	74%	79%	57%	50%	70%
Other	0%	11%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%





What are founders using AI for?

Founders prioritise AI for automation (86%), faster processes (81%) and marketing (70%). Those business owners aged 46 to 55 are particularly focused on using AI for marketing purposes.



Barriers to adoption

The main obstacle preventing Irish businesses from adopting AI is the cost of licences and subscription fees (67%). This concern is most acute for younger founders aged **25 to 35** (78%). A greater concern to older founders (**56 to 65**) is a skills gap inside the business that stops them using the technology (57%).

Fig 7. How founders are using AI – breakdown by gender

	Female	Male	Total %
Number of respondents			
Chatbots or virtual assistants	19%	33%	24%
Customer relationship management (CRM) with AI features	14%	23%	17%
Marketing automation with AI targeting	13%	13%	13%
Google Gemini or Chat GPT for content creation	83%	80%	82%
Social media analytics or management with AI	19%	17%	18%
Predictive analytics for sales or finances	5%	7%	5%
Data processing or reporting with AI tools	14%	23%	17%
Other	11%	13%	12%

Fig 8. What's holding founders back – breakdown by age

	18–24	25–35	36–45	46–55	56–65	65+	Total count
Cost		29%	36%	0%	36%		24%
Lack of understanding	0%	29%	71%	100%	18%		61%
Concerns about AI replacing jobs		14%	14%	0%	18%		10%
Difficulty integrating with existing systems		14%	14%	0%	73%		14%
Lack of awareness about relevant AI technologies		29%	71%	0%	18%		48%
Concerns about data security and privacy		0%	36%	33%	18%		24%
Other	14%	0%	0%	0%	27%		7%



82% founders are using AI use Google Gemini or Chat GPT for content creation

Limited use of government support

Only 54% of founders have taken advantage of government support. However, older founders (56 to 65) show a higher uptake of Local Enterprise Office (LEO) vouchers (29%), which suggests that targeted financial instruments could be particularly effective.

Strong appetite for support

Sixty-nine per cent of founders want access to training, while **65%** would like financial support to help them adopt AI. Preferred formats for learning about AI include **blogs, webinars, templates and step-by-step guides**. There is a clear opportunity to improve how learning is delivered, especially for busy founders who can't commit to long courses or formal qualifications.



Case study

How mykidstime.com uses AI to build smarter and sell better



mykidstime.com, owned by Mead Media and recognised as Ireland's largest independently owned parenting blog, says AI has transformed the 14-month-old business. The brand has also recently been named as a registered TikTok partner.

Co-founder Michelle Mead says despite having a background in tech, adopting AI was not one of the first things the business did. "We were quite late adopting AI, if you can say that about a 14-month-old business," she explains. "For the first six to seven months, we'd messed around with AI but hadn't really found the benefits for us.

"Then I upgraded ChatGPT to the paid version to see if that gave us any better results. At the time, we were developing an app for mykidstime.com, so we had the basis of what we wanted. But when we started to feed ChatGPT data about the app and what we needed from it, it was able to come up with a better, easier structure.

"That meant when we went out to developers, we could confidently explain what we required and what we considered 'nice to have'."

AI has also helped the business bring in more B2B customers and market specifically to them. "We create content for our B2C customers through our blog and app," Michelle explains.

"But we also needed to market to our B2B customers for Mead Media's other brand Parents and Brands, a market research company with a custom-built portal.

"B2B marketing is completely different and AI really helped us structure that. It allowed us to break down how we can target our marketing for those different customers by creating personas. It's also focused our minds on what we need to be doing, and how, to attract businesses."

Michelle says the business also uses AI to help with grant applications. While applications do need a lot of checking and editing, AI brings it all together and can structure the information efficiently. "When ChatGPT knows a bit more about your business, it can be helpful because some of those grant applications can take weeks."

The business signed up to Tech Hub Ireland eight months ago and found it really helped with its understanding of what technology it needed to put behind the business.

"Right from the start, Tech Hub gave us guidance on things we hadn't considered yet," Michelle explains. "Almost like a checklist for what we should be doing and the kind of systems that would be suitable. But also, it's given us good connections to people and I love the Lunch and Learns as well."

Mead Media was recently named as a TikTok partner and is now helping brands to build their profiles and make sure they're using the platform's tools and metrics correctly. Its focus is currently on TikTok Shop – which has only recently launched in Ireland – and TikTok Live selling.

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Policy recommendation: A comprehensive AI support initiative for Irish founders

Based on our survey's findings and in line with existing government policy, we recommend enhancing and expanding current supports to establish a **national AI acceleration programme for Irish SMEs**. This would act as a focused stream within the broader agenda for digital transition.

Rather than creating new infrastructure from scratch, this initiative should **build on existing programmes** such as the **Local Enterprise Office's Digital for Business** and **Grow Digital voucher scheme**, **Enterprise Ireland's AI for SMEs** and the **Digital Transition Fund**, while introducing founder-led supports that reflect the lived experiences and real-world barriers that Irish SMEs face.



1. Expand and simplify financial supports

- Pilot a low-barrier 'AI implementation voucher scheme' designed to help small businesses adopt AI tools. Vouchers, valued at between €1,000 and €3,000, would allow businesses to cover costs such as software licences and AI training and consultancy.
- Make access to digitalisation grants easier with a simple application process, short application form and basic eligibility criteria that prioritises female-led businesses, rural entrepreneurs and those with no prior digital funding.
- Increase uptake with a national communications campaign that includes simple case studies and stories of how small businesses are using AI.



2. Build confidence through practical training

- Introduce short-form, role-based AI learning modules (for example, AI for marketing, AI for admin tasks) available in a range of formats: self-paced, live online and in-person.
- Partner with Skillnet Ireland, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and local Connected Hubs to deliver confidence-building workshops, especially for older founders and women entrepreneurs.
- Bring training content into line with the National AI Strategy, making sure it's relevant to the needs of micro and small businesses.



3. Create a central hub for tools and templates

- Develop an online portal that houses toolkits, video explainers, case studies and interactive demos showing how Irish SMEs are using AI on a day-to-day basis.
- Include use case stories from across the country – particularly outside major cities – to make sure rural SMEs are included in the AI conversation.



4. Provide mentorship and peer support

- Establish peer-learning groups through LEO networks and enterprise centres, linking experienced AI users with people who are new to the technology.
- Develop a founder-led ambassador programme to showcase local success stories and promote practical advice.

As an established platform with strong industry partnerships, built-in diagnostics and access to up-to-date resources and training, Tech Hub is well placed to support these recommendations. Having engaged over 9,000 small businesses since launch in November 2024, it could help signpost funding, deliver tailored AI training and host real-world small business stories, ensuring that support reaches the businesses that need it most.



Conclusion

Irish entrepreneurs aren't waiting around – they're already adopting AI to boost productivity and free up precious time. But this report shows that adoption alone is not enough. Without the right supports in place – including training, funding and easy-to-access information – many small businesses risk being left behind.

There is a clear opportunity here for **government, industry and business support organisations to work together** to build on existing initiatives, such as Tech Hub and deliver targeted support that meets founders where they are. Whether it's simplifying access to AI tools, boosting people's confidence in technology or creating easy-to-consume training content, the path forward is clear.

If we want Irish SMEs to thrive in a digital-first economy, we need to make sure **no business is left out of the AI conversation**. The action we take now, from policy to programme design, will determine whether AI becomes a tool for a few or a powerful enabler for many.



There is a clear opportunity here for government, industry and business support organisations to work together.

About Tech Hub Ireland

Tech Hub Ireland, a dynamic new platform designed to deliver personalised recommendations, digital training and ongoing support to help small businesses embrace technology for growth and sustainability.

It is a private sector-led initiative built by Enterprise Nation and supported by Amazon, Google, Vodafone Business Ireland, Square, .ie and GS1. Through the hub, businesses can gain access to diagnostics, tailored action plans and expert resources.

The Small Business Tech Consortium is a pioneering initiative uniting some of the world's leading technology companies – Amazon, Google, Vodafone Business Ireland, Square, .ie and GS1 – alongside small business leaders, to influence digital policy and accelerate digital adoption for Ireland's smallest companies.

About the research

The research was undertaken in Ireland among 120 small businesses in May 2025.

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