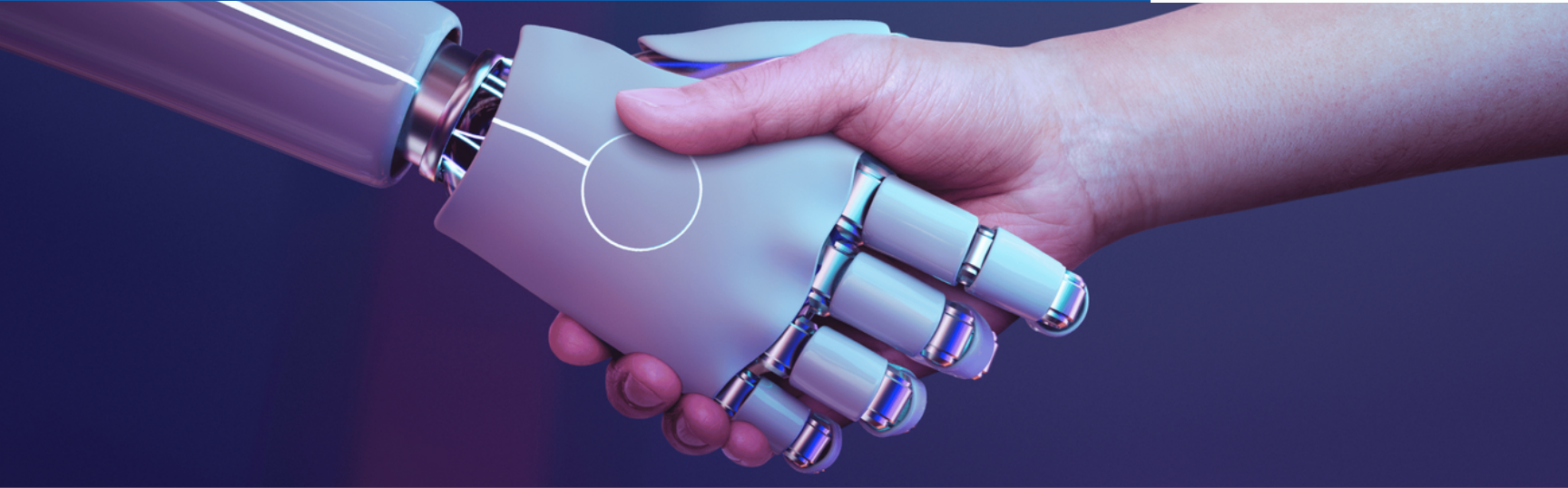




TECH TALK

“Insider Tips to Make Your Business Run
Faster, Easier and More Profitable”

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We love technology and we love helping people.

Give me a call today for a quick (non-salesy) chat to find out whether my team and I can help you better secure your data and get more out of your existing technology!

- John W Harmon, PhD
Founder & CEO

AI DEMYSTIFIED: WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THE CURRENT TOOLS ON THE MARKET IN 2025

Walk into almost any IT department right now, and you’ll hear the same conversation at least once a week: “Have you tried that new AI tool yet? I heard it’s a game-changer.”

The truth is that the market is buzzing with promise and noise. A recent McKinsey survey shows that 78% of companies now use AI in some form, and that number is climbing.

Why AI Feels Different This Time

AI, of course, isn’t new. However, something has shifted over the last two years. Models have become better at understanding context, generating content, and even juggling multiple formats at once.

Under the hood, the big three technologies driving this shift are:

- **Machine Learning (ML):** These are the systems that improve with every dataset they touch. It’s what makes recommendation engines get eerily accurate over time.
- **Natural Language Processing (NLP):** The bit that lets a machine understand your request when you type, “Can you pull the latest metrics from that report?” and not just spit out a keyword search.
- **Generative AI:** The creative side of AI that builds something from scratch: a paragraph, a code snippet, an image, or even a full video.

- The Tool Categories Worth Knowing**
- **Chatbots & Virtual Assistants**
 - ChatGPT now handles images, audio, and real-time conversation, and remembers your preferences.
 - Google Gemini slots directly into Gmail, Sheets, and Docs. It is handy if you already live in Google Workspace.
 - Grok AI leans toward problem-solving and data-heavy reasoning, pulling in live info when needed.
 - **Content Creation**
 - Jasper AI: Aimed squarely at marketers, with built-in SEO and formatting help.
 - Anyword: Used to tweak tone for specific audiences.
 - Writer: Used to keep enterprise-level brand voice consistent.
 - **Image & Design**
 - Midjourney is the favorite for striking, artistic visuals.
 - Stable Diffusion gives you full creative control.
 - DALL-E 3 is simple to use inside ChatGPT for quick edits and iterations.
 - Google Imagen 3 is precise and can handle prompts in multiple languages.
 - Adobe Firefly keeps everything legally safe and feeds straight into Photoshop.

- **Video & Storytelling**
 - Runway ML combines AI image generation with video editing.
 - Descript and Filmora handle editing, transcription, and polishing without requiring a pro studio.
- **Search & Research**
 - Perplexity AI blends live search with AI summaries so you’re not guessing about accuracy.
 - Arc Search speeds up web research with on-the-fly summaries.
- **Productivity & Collaboration**
 - Notion AI and Mem: Used to surface the right knowledge at the right time.
 - Asana, Any.do, and BeeDone: Project tools used to schedule and keep track of tasks

- Fireflies and Avoma: These meeting assistants can take notes so your team can actually talk.
- Reclaim and Clockwise: These calendar managers make meetings less of a Tetris game.

A Final Thought (and a Bit of Caution)

The current lineup of tools can be incredibly powerful, but they’re not magic. If you’re not sure where to begin, try one experiment this quarter. Small steps now will make bigger moves easier later.

Contact us for help figuring out which AI tools make sense for your IT business and which ones you can safely skip.



SHOKZ NEW OPENMEET

An open-ear headset designed for effortless communication, SHOKZ New OpenMeet keeps you connected and comfortable all day.

Its lightweight, ergonomic design and bone conduction technology let you hear clearly while staying aware of your environment.

With dual noise-canceling microphones, quick pairing, and long battery life, Openmeet is ideal for remote workers and anyone seeking a premium, open-ear audio solution.



ADVANCED STRATEGIES TO LOCK DOWN YOUR BUSINESS LOGINS

Good login security works in layers. The more hoops an attacker has to jump through, the less likely they are to make it to your sensitive data.

Here are some practical tips to make sure your employees are protected.

- **Strengthen Password and Authentication Policies.** If your company still allows short, predictable logins or reuses passwords, you’ve already given attackers a head start. Here’s what works better:
 - Require unique, complex passwords for every account.
 - Swap out traditional passwords for passphrases; easier for humans to remember, harder for machines to guess.
 - Roll out a password manager so staff can store and auto-generate strong credentials.

- **Enforce multi-factor authentication (MFA) everywhere possible.**
 - Check passwords against known breach lists and rotate them periodically.
 - Apply the rules across the board. Leaving one “less important” account unprotected is like locking your front door but leaving the garage wide open.
- **Reduce Risk Through Access Control and Least Privilege.**
 - The fewer keys in circulation, the fewer chances there are for one to be stolen.
 - Keep admin privileges limited to the smallest possible group.
 - Separate super admin accounts from day-to-day logins and store them securely.
 - Give third parties the bare minimum access they need.

- **Secure Devices, Networks, and Browsers.** Your login policies won’t mean much if someone signs in from a compromised device or an open public network.
 - Encrypt every company laptop and require strong passwords.
 - Use mobile security apps, especially for staff who connect on the go.
 - Lock down your Wi-Fi.
 - Keep firewalls active, both on-site and for remote workers.
 - Turn on automatic updates for browsers, operating systems, and apps.
- **Protect Email as a Common Attack Gateway.** One convincing message, and an employee clicks a link they shouldn’t. To close that door:
 - Enable advanced phishing and malware filtering.
 - Set up SPF, DKIM, and DMARC to make your domain harder to spoof.

- Train your team to verify unexpected requests.
- **Plan for the Inevitable with Incident Response and Monitoring.** Even the best defenses can be bypassed. The question is how fast you can respond.
 - Incident Response Plan
 - Vulnerability Scanning
 - Credential Monitoring
 - Regular Backups

Make Your Logins a Security Asset, Not a Weak Spot

You don’t have to do it all overnight. Start with the weakest link right now, maybe an old, shared admin password or a lack of MFA on your most sensitive systems and fix it. Then move to the next gap. Over time, those small improvements add up to a solid, layered defense.

WHY A SMALL BUSINESS IT ROADMAP IS NO LONGER OPTIONAL

A few years back, most owners thought of IT as background support, quietly keeping the lights on. Today it’s front-and-center in sales, service, marketing, and even reputation management. When the tech stalls, so does the business.

The risk extends past downtime or slow responses to customers. It’s the steady drip of missed efficiency and untapped opportunity. Without a plan, small businesses often buy tools on impulse to solve urgent issues, only to find they clash with existing systems, blow up budgets, or duplicate something already paid for.

Think about the ripple effects:

- Security gaps that invite trouble.
- Wasted spending on licenses nobody uses.
- Systems that choke when growth takes off.
- Customer delays that leave a poor impression.

If that list feels uncomfortably familiar, you’re not alone. The real question isn’t whether to create an IT roadmap; it’s how fast you can build one that actually moves your business

forward to the right direction.

At its core, an IT roadmap is about connection: Linking your business goals, technology, and people so they work toward the same outcomes.

Done well, it:

- Keeps technology spending focused on what matters most.
- Prevents redundancy and streamlines operations.
- Improves the customer experience through better tools and integration.
- Prepares you to adapt quickly when new technology or opportunities emerge.

If you’ve been running without a plan, the good news is you can start small: Set a goal, take inventory, and map the first few steps. You don’t have to have everything perfect right away. What matters is moving from reaction mode to intentional, strategic action.

Contact us to start building a futureready IT roadmap that turns your technology from a patchwork of tools into a true growth engine for your business.

HOW SMART IT BUILDS A HIGH-MORALE, HIGH RETENTION WORKFORCE

Smart IT is about shaping technology, so it supports your people in ways they actually notice and appreciate. Here’s where it makes the biggest impact:

- **Reliability:** How many minutes do your employees lose to slow apps or glitchy systems?
- **Usability:** Technology should be a silent enabler instead of a daily obstacle.
- **Personalize with AI:** Internal AI tools can answer routine questions instantly.
- **Communication:** Tools like Teams, Slack, Zoom keep connection alive.

- **Interconnectivity:** Magic happens when systems talk to each other.
- **Flexibility:** Being able to work from anywhere when needed? That’s huge.
- **Work-Life Balance:** Being able to set statuses, block focus time, or quiet notifications outside work hours.
- **Recognize and Reward:** A quick shout-out after someone solves an issue sticks.
- **Rollouts Matter:** Even the best tool can flop without context, training, and follow-up.
- **Streamline, don’t stack:** Fewer tools that talk to each other beat a jumble of disconnected apps.

6 COMPLIANCE BEST PRACTICES FOR SMBS

- 1. Map Your Data:** Do an inventory of every type of data you hold, where it lives, who has access, and how it’s used.
- 2. Limit What You Keep:** If you don’t truly need a piece of information, don’t collect it. If you have to, keep it only as long as necessary.
- 3. Build a Real Data Protection Policy:** Put your rules in writing. Spell out how data is classified, stored, backed up, and, if needed, securely destroyed.
- 4. Train People and Keep Training:** Most breaches start with a human slip. Teach staff how to spot phishing, use secure file-sharing tools, and create strong passwords.
- 5. Encrypt in Transit and at Rest:** Use SSL/TLS on your website, VPNs for remote access, and encryption for stored files.
- 6. Don’t Ignore Physical Security:** If it can walk out the door, it should be encrypted

SIMPLE AND IMPACTFUL DATA VISUALIZATION

- A good visual should feel effortless to read. Here’s how to make that happen without overcomplicating it:
- **Start With Your Audience in Mind:** A CEO scanning a quarterly update won’t need the same level of detail as a marketing intern checking campaign click rates.
 - **Match the Chart to the Story:** Do you want to compare sales in 3 regions? Use a bar chart. Tracking customer churn over 12 months? Go for a line chart.
 - **Keep the Clutter Out:** If it doesn’t help someone “get it” faster, strip it out.
 - **Use Color Like a Highlighter, Not Wallpaper:** One bold hue to flag the key number can do more than a rainbow will.
 - **Let People Explore When Possible:** An interactive dashboard is like handing someone a magnifying glass. They can zoom in on the details instead of asking you to dig for it later.

TECHNOLOGY TRIVIA TIME

Each month you have a chance to win a \$50 Amazon Gift Voucher by being the first person to email us with the answer to our Technology Trivia Question of the Month!



The question this month is:
Which AI-powered virtual assistant was developed by Amazon?

The first person to email me at john@marioncs.com with the correct answer gets a \$50 Amazon Gift Card!

Last month’s answer was **Personal Identification Number**

