



The AI Automation Business

Boring automations that answer leads in seconds and chase invoices without being asked. Sell saved hours and caught revenue, never science fiction.

\$130-795

START LEAN

21-45 days

FIRST DOLLAR

75-85%

TYPICAL MARGIN

Is this your business?

Underneath the loudest hype cycle in a decade sits a real business: small companies leak money through missed calls, slow lead replies, manual data entry, and follow-up that never happens, and modern AI tools can plug those leaks for a few thousand dollars a build. The market is young, noisy, and crawling with course-bros reselling screenshots. That is the opportunity: the bar for being a credible professional has never been lower, and the demand is real.

\$130-795

LEAN STARTUP COST

\$1,500-3,500

STANDARD BUILD

21-45 days

TIME TO FIRST DOLLAR

75-85%

TYPICAL GROSS MARGIN

Yes, fully

SOLO-FRIENDLY

Yes, entirely

HOME-BASED

BUILT FOR THESE FOUNDER TYPES

THE BUILDER

THE ADVISOR

4/5 difficulty

THE HONEST FIT TEST

You need three things: enough technical comfort to wire APIs and automation platforms together, enough patience to map a messy human process before automating it, and the discipline to sell outcomes instead of buzzwords. If you want to demo cool robots, this will humble you. If 'your missed calls now text back in 40 seconds' sounds like a product you would be proud to sell, you are early to a real market.

Who pays, and why now.

Every small business runs on manual glue: the office manager retyping leads into a spreadsheet, the owner answering the same five questions by text at 9 p.m., the invoice that gets chased only when cash gets tight. AI and automation platforms (n8n, Make, Zapier, plus LLM APIs) can now replace most of that glue reliably and cheaply. The buyer does not want AI. The buyer wants the phone answered, the lead called back, and the Friday afternoon back. Sell that.

Be honest about what this market is: young, noisy, and unlicensed. Half the 'AI agency' founders on your feed have never invoiced a client, and the term has been pre-ruined for some buyers by hype merchants selling \$10,000 chatbots that answered nothing. This cuts both ways. Skepticism is higher, which punishes vague pitches, and trust is scarce, which means one operator with documented builds, real numbers, and plain English wins entire local markets almost uncontested.

The most sellable builds are aggressively boring. Missed-call text-back. Speed-to-lead: a new inquiry gets a personalized reply in under a minute instead of next Tuesday. Intake and document collection. Quote follow-up sequences. Review requests after every job. Report assembly that used to eat a Monday. Each is a \$2,000-7,500 build with provable dollar value, and none of them require frontier research: they require someone to map the process and wire it properly.

The honest constraint: this is a trust-and-maintenance business, not a launch-and-leave business. Models change, APIs deprecate, and a workflow that ran silently for five months can break silently in the sixth. That is exactly why maintenance retainers of \$500-2,000 a month exist, and why the operators who survive treat monitoring as a product. The build is the wedding; the retainer is the marriage, and the marriage is where the business lives.

WHO BUYS	WHAT THEY PAY	WHAT THEY ACTUALLY WANT
Home services and contractors	\$2,000-5,000 per build	Missed calls recovered, leads answered in seconds, quotes chased
Professional practices (law, accounting)	\$3,000-7,500 per build	Intake, document collection, and scheduling without staff hours
Ecommerce and online businesses	\$2,500-7,500 per build	Support triage, order ops, and reporting that runs itself
Agencies and consultancies	\$2,000-5,000 + retainers	Internal fulfillment and reporting automated; white-label builds

THE LEAD-RESPONSE WINDOW

5 minutes

Leads contacted within five minutes convert at many times the rate of leads contacted in an hour, and most small businesses respond in hours or never. The single most sellable automation in this catalog is the one that answers in 40 seconds, every time, including Saturday.

Every dollar, before you spend it.

The platforms have free tiers, the APIs bill in cents, and the laptop is already on your desk. Spend on the legal foundation and insurance, because your product touches client revenue and customer data. Everything else, revenue buys.

THE LEAN BUILD · START HERE	WHY IT EARNS ITS PLACE	COST
Laptop you already own	The workshop, the demo room, and the support desk	\$0
Automation platform (n8n, Make, or Zapier)	Pick one as your primary and go deep; depth is the moat	\$0-50/mo
LLM API credits (OpenAI, Anthropic, Google)	Demos and builds bill in cents; clients pay their own usage at handoff	\$20-50/mo
LLC + business license	Your liability wall. See the legal page	\$50-500
E&O + cyber insurance (first month)	You hold API keys and touch customer data; both policies, day one	\$40-80/mo
One-page site + domain	Three documented builds with numbers, one button	\$20-100
Business bank account + bookkeeping app	Separate money from day one; future-you says thanks	\$0-15/mo
Lean total		\$130-795 all-in

THE STANDARD BUILD · ADD AFTER FIRST REVENUE	WHAT IT UNLOCKS	COST
Voice/chat agent platform	Unlocks AI receptionist builds, the highest-demand offer in local markets	\$50-150/mo
CRM and tool sandbox subscriptions	You must test inside the tools your niche actually uses	\$50-100/mo
Demo recording tools (Loom or similar)	A two-minute walkthrough of a real build is your best salesperson	\$15-30/mo
Subcontract developer budget	Custom code edges without hiring; protect your delivery dates	\$200-500

THE RULE

Do not buy the \$5,000 'AI agency accelerator.' The platforms publish free documentation better than any course, and the gurus selling shortcuts are your future competitors' handicap. Build three real automations for your own business first: that is the accelerator, and it is free.

Clean from day one.

You are wiring software into other people's revenue, customer conversations, and data. The legal work here is unusually load-bearing: a good contract plus honest disclosure is most of what separates a professional from the hype merchants.

- Form your LLC:** File in your home state, get the EIN free at irs.gov, open the business bank account. THE LAUNCHPAD Module Three walks every step.
- Service agreement with scope and a liability cap:** Named workflows, defined deliverables, a support window, and liability capped at fees paid. Your automation will touch real customer communication; the cap is what makes that survivable when something misfires.
- Build in their accounts, transfer on payment:** Platforms, API keys, and phone numbers belong to the client, set up under their billing, with your admin access. IP in the workflow transfers at final payment; your reusable components and templates stay yours.
- Data privacy and the PII diet:** Send the minimum data necessary through any API, know where it is processed, and put a data-handling clause in the contract. Healthcare data is a special regime: decline HIPAA work until you are genuinely equipped for it.
- AI disclosure:** Several states already require bots to disclose they are bots in some contexts, and the trend is one-directional. Default customer-facing agents to honest disclosure: 'this is an automated assistant' costs nothing and protects everyone, including the brand.
- TCPA and SMS consent:** Automated texts to people who never consented carry statutory damages of \$500-1,500 per message. Missed-call text-back is generally safe (they contacted the business first); cold SMS blasts are a lawsuit machine. Build consent into every flow that sends.
- Confidentiality and no-poach:** You will see lead lists, pricing, margins, and process secrets. A one-page mutual confidentiality clause makes serious clients trust you faster, and it is table stakes for white-label agency work.

INSURANCE, SPECIFICALLY

Carry both from day one: E&O at \$30-60 a month for when an automation double-messages a client's entire list or a misrouted workflow costs real money, and cyber liability for the API keys, logins, and customer data you hold. You are a single point of compromise for every system you connect; insure like it.

WATCH FOR

Silent failure. An automation that errors loudly gets fixed; one that quietly stops sending follow-ups can bleed a client's pipeline for weeks before anyone notices, and the discovery conversation is brutal. Build error alerts and a weekly health check into every delivery, and put monitoring in the maintenance retainer. 'How will we know if it breaks?' is the most professional sentence in your sales call.

Requirements vary by state and city. Verify with your state, city clerk, and a licensed professional. Education, not legal advice.

Three doors. Real numbers.

Price the build as a project and the upkeep as a retainer, and anchor everything to the dollar value of the leak you are plugging. A missed-call system that recovers two jobs a month for a roofer is not competing with a \$29 SaaS subscription, and your quote should not act like it is.

	RECOMMEND	
<p>DOOR ONE</p> <h3>The Single Workflow</h3> <p>\$2,000–3,500 <small>starter</small></p> <p>build</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ One automation end-to-end (e.g., missed-call text-back + speed-to-lead)◆ Process mapping session included◆ Error alerts and a handoff walkthrough video◆ 30 days of post-launch fixes	<p>DOOR TWO</p> <h3>The Operations Pack</h3> <p>\$5,000–7,500 <small>most-</small></p> <p>booked</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ 3-4 connected workflows: lead response, intake, follow-up, reporting◆ Full process-mapping workshop with the team◆ Documentation and team training session◆ 60 days of support and tuning◆ Monitoring dashboard set up	<p>DOOR THREE</p> <h3>The Automation Partner</h3> <p>\$750–1,500/mo</p> <p>retainer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Monitoring, error response, and weekly health checks◆ Fixes when APIs and models change◆ One improvement or new mini-workflow per month◆ Priority response window◆ Quarterly process review

PRICING NOTES FOR THIS BUSINESS

- Floor: \$1,500 for any custom build. Below that you are debugging for free by week three.
- 50% deposit before the mapping session, balance at handoff. No exceptions, including for friends.
- Charge for discovery: a \$500-750 process-mapping session, credited against the build if they proceed. It filters tire-kickers and produces the scope document that protects you.
- Quote in their numbers: 'this recovers roughly \$3,000 a month in missed jobs' beats any feature list ever written.
- Offer the maintenance retainer at every handoff, framed as monitoring, not dependence. Most clients take it once they understand APIs change.

THE UPSSELL THAT PAYS THE RENT

The maintenance retainer is the business. Builds are the wedge; \$500-2,000 a month for monitoring, fixes, and one monthly improvement is the annuity, and it is honest: platforms update, models deprecate, and workflows touch systems that change without warning. Ten retainers at \$1,000 is a stable five-figure month before you sell a single new build.

Names, not strategies.

The portfolio paradox is amplified here by hype fatigue: buyers have seen the demos and want receipts. The fix is to automate real operations, starting with your own, and trade founding builds for documented, numbers-attached case studies. Show the leak, plug the leak, publish the meter.

1 Automate your own business first

Your lead intake, your proposal follow-up, your bookkeeping handoff. Record two-minute walkthroughs of each. 'Here is the system running my own company' is the only demo that survives buyer skepticism in a market this noisy.

2 Two founding builds at half rate

Pick two businesses with a visible leak and build the fix at 50% in exchange for before-and-after numbers, a testimonial, and a published case study. Hours saved and calls recovered are the currencies; collect both in writing.

3 The missed-call test

Call ten local businesses at 2 p.m. on a Tuesday. The ones that ring out are your prospect list, and the test itself is your opener: you are not pitching AI, you are reporting a leak you personally witnessed, with a timestamp.

4 Businesses you already buy from

Your mechanic, your gym, your accountant. You have seen their intake chaos from the customer side. Warm familiarity plus a specific observed leak converts at rates cold outreach never touches.

5 Agencies and consultancies

They sell digital competence and run on manual reporting and copy-paste fulfillment. Internal builds for agencies are quiet, repeatable revenue, and they refer you to clients once you have saved their own Mondays.

6 One niche, on purpose

Pick a vertical early: contractors, law firms, clinics. One niche means one stack of tools to learn, one set of workflows to template, and case studies that compound instead of scattering.

THE EXACT ASK

"Hi [name], I called [business] Tuesday at 2:15 and it rang through to voicemail: most callers will not leave one, they just call the next [niche] on the list. I build a system that texts every missed caller back within a minute and books them from the text thread. I run it for my own company and I am taking two founding clients this quarter at half my normal build price, in exchange for tracking the results publicly. Can I show you a two-minute video of it working?"

THE FOUNDING-CUSTOMER DEAL

Two founding builds at 50% off, in exchange for baseline numbers before launch, results after 60 days, a testimonial, and a published case study. Founding clients also get the maintenance retainer at \$500 for the first six months. When the second build ships, founding pricing retires publicly. Proof with a meter on it is worth more than the discount costs.

Owned, earned, then paid.

In a market saturated with hype, the winning aesthetic is receipts: real builds, real numbers, plain English. Your engine is documented walkthroughs, one niche community, and partners who already hold your buyer's trust. Skip the futurism; publish the meter readings.

CHANNEL, RANKED	WHY IT WORKS HERE	THE FIRST MOVE
Documented builds (Loom + LinkedIn)	A two-minute video of a real system beats any AI thinkpiece	Publish one walkthrough per month: the leak, the build, the numbers
The missed-call audit	Specific, verifiable, and impossible to confuse with hype	Ten test calls a week; open every pitch with the timestamped result
Niche owner rooms	Owners trust demos from people in the room over ads from anywhere	One association or chamber meeting monthly; demo on a laptop, live
Agency and consultant partnerships	They hold trust with dozens of your exact buyers and cannot build	Offer white-label builds at fixed rates to three local firms
Case studies with meters	Hours saved and calls recovered are the only credible AI marketing	One numbers-included case study per quarter, baseline screenshotted first

FIVE CONTENT PIECES THAT WIN THIS NICHE

- I called 20 local businesses at 2 p.m.: 13 missed the call, and here is what that costs them
- What an AI automation actually costs in 2026, and the red flags in the \$10,000 chatbot pitch
- The build log: how a roofer's missed calls became 9 booked jobs in 60 days
- Five boring automations that beat a chatbot for any local business
- How we monitor client automations so failures get caught in minutes, not weeks

THE REVIEW MACHINE

Ask at the 60-day review, when the meter is on screen: 'The system caught 31 missed calls and booked 9 of them. Would you put that in a Google review? I'll text you the link right now.' In a market allergic to hype, a review from a named local owner with a number in it is the single most disarming asset you can own.

One unit, one month, no fog.

Two honest snapshots: what one standard build actually nets, and what a steady solo month looks like once a small retainer book exists. These use the middle door at \$6,000 and real platform costs. No 'passive AI income' math, because there is none.

ONE UNIT: ONE OPERATIONS PACK AT \$6,000	AMOUNT	A WORKING MONTH: SOLO, 1 BUILD + 6 RETAINERS	AMOUNT
Revenue	\$6,000	Revenue (build + maintenance book)	\$10,500
API + platform costs (build phase)	-\$150	API + software stack	-\$420
Payment processing (2.9%)	-\$174	Subcontract dev (overflow)	-\$400
Insurance + overhead share	-\$70	Insurance (E&O + cyber), phone	-\$220
Gross profit (40-50 hrs over 3-4 weeks)	\$5,606	Marketing (rooms, demos, cards)	-\$150
Tax reserve (27%)	-\$1,514	Pre-tax profit	\$9,310
Yours, per build	\$4,092	Tax reserve (27%)	-\$2,514
		Owner take-home	\$6,796

BREAK-EVEN

1 build

A single founding build at half rate returns the lean startup cost several times over. The durable money is the retainer column: six maintenance clients cover overhead before any new sale, which is what lets you quote builds calmly instead of desperately. Calm quotes close better.

Illustrative figures at typical market rates; your market, prices, and costs will differ. Run YOUR numbers in the One-Page P&L from THE LAUNCHPAD, Module Six. Remember the 25-30% tax reserve on every dollar of profit.

Pre-decided, so motivation is never consulted.

WEEK ONE: FOUNDATIONS

- LLC filed, EIN issued, business bank account open
- E&O + cyber insurance bound; certificates saved
- Primary platform chosen; niche chosen; both written down
- Your own business automated: intake, follow-up, booking
- Contract finalized: scope, liability cap, deposit, AI disclosure

WEEK TWO: DOORS OPEN

- Three walkthrough videos recorded of your own systems
- Missed-call test run on 10 local businesses, results logged
- Founding offer pitched to 5 warm contacts
- Discovery session productized: agenda, price, scope template
- One-page site live with the three walkthroughs

WEEK THREE: MOMENTUM

- First founding build signed; deposit collected; mapping session run
- Build one underway with error alerts from day one
- Second founding client closed or pipeline at 10 warm
- Three agencies pitched white-label builds
- Baseline metrics screenshotted for the case study

WEEK FOUR: THE SYSTEM

- Build one delivered: training, documentation, handoff video
- Maintenance retainer offered at handoff
- First build log published on LinkedIn
- Founding pricing publicly retired or final spot announced
- Month-one P&L done; pick one growth lever for month two

DAY 30 VERDICT

Green light: one build delivered or in flight, a deposit on the second, and 5+ warm conversations. Yellow: interest but no deposits: you are pitching AI instead of leaks, so reopen with the missed-call timestamps and the dollar math, and re-run week two. Red: zero closes despite 25+ real asks: your proof is invisible. Spend two weeks making your own automated operation undeniable on video, then return with receipts instead of futurism.

How this business fails, and how it grows.

THE FIVE KILLERS

- ✗ **Selling AI instead of outcomes**
Nobody budgets for 'AI'; they budget for answered calls, faster quotes, and saved payroll hours. Lead with the leak and its dollar size. The technology is your kitchen, not your menu.

- ✗ **Shipping demo-ware**
A workflow without error handling, alerts, and monitoring is a demo wearing a price tag. Silent failures destroy trust permanently. Build the boring reliability layer into every quote, because it is the actual product.

- ✗ **Building in your own accounts**
If the platform, keys, and phone numbers live under your login, you have taken a hostage and become a single point of failure. Their accounts, their billing, your access. Professionals are replaceable on purpose.

- ✗ **The one-and-done build**
APIs deprecate, models change, and the client's process drifts. A build without a maintenance plan is a countdown to an angry call. Offer monitoring at every handoff and let those retainers become the business.

- ✗ **Chasing every shiny tool**
A new model drops weekly and none of them close your next client. One niche, one platform, three productized offers, repeated until boring. The operators winning this market are the least excitable people in it.

THREE SCALE PATHS

- 1 **The vertical specialist**
Own one industry's entire automation stack: intake, scheduling, follow-up, reporting for law firms, or clinics, or contractors. Templated builds drop delivery from weeks to days, and the case studies recruit the next client for you.

- 2 **The productized install**
Turn your best build into a fixed-price, named product: 'the missed-call recovery system, \$2,500, live in one week.' Sales calls shrink, delivery is checklist-driven, and a junior can install it, which is the moment it became a company.

- 3 **The retainer book**
Stack maintenance and improvement retainers until recurring covers all overhead, then hire a junior builder for delivery while you keep discovery, architecture, and relationships. Twenty retainers is an agency; it just does not look like the ones on YouTube.

YOUR FIRST HIRE

A junior builder or technical VA once the retainer book passes eight clients: they take monitoring, ticket triage, and templated installs from your runbooks. They free the half of your week that is maintenance, not architecture, and they are your systems test: if your documentation cannot guide a stranger through a health check without breaking production, fix the docs before the headcount.

THE STAIRCASE CONTINUES

The playbook is the map. The machine is waiting.

Everything this playbook describes, Epic Advisory Group can build with you: the brand, the cinematic website, the entity, the engine. Describe your idea to the Launch Engine and see your business real in about sixty seconds, free.

- The Launch Engine: your idea, built free, in about a minute
- THE ASCENT: Founder Edition: the eight-module course
- Launch-in-a-Box: entity, brand, site, and first campaign, one flat price
- Growth, capital readiness, and the path to the public markets

"There is no right age. There is only the decision."



Epic Advisory Group

EPICADVISORYGROUP.NET