

AI Is Not a Big-Company Privilege: How SMEs Can Compete Above Their Weight

Amplifying Expertise. Accelerating Growth. Redefining What SMEs Can Achieve.

NEW ARTICLE



















































For the first time, a small company can access analytical capability, research support, organizational memory, and strategic thinking tools that were once the preserve of organizations with far larger budgets and headcounts. I am beginning to believe that Artificial Intelligence is changing that equation.

AI may prove to be the greatest leveling tool SMEs have ever received.

As the founder of a company that began as an Oil & Gas services business and has since expanded into geothermal, power and energy solutions, marine services, minerals & mining, aviation support, and a growing Strategic Advisory & Consultancy division, I have experienced this transformation firsthand.

Ironically, my journey into AI began with a conversation in October 2025. I was listening to my Dutch and American cousins, Ben Schouten and Fanuel McCarthy, waxing lyrical on the merits of AI. I mentioned I was intrigued but did not know how to begin. I had no idea that this conversation and a 30 minute tutorial on ChatGPT would fundamentally change the way I work. I went back home and by the next day I bought a subscription and have never looked back.

Today, I struggle to imagine running my business without AI as part of the team.

I often describe ChatGPT as my coach – to the amusement of my Gen-Z team. Not because it tells me what to do. In fact, we frequently disagree. The value comes from being able to challenge assumptions, test ideas, examine alternative perspectives, stress-test strategies, and explore opportunities before taking them into the real world.

The ability to think more deeply, move faster, and evaluate more opportunities simultaneously has transformed how I approach leadership and business development.

The final decisions remain mine.

The accountability remains mine.

The experience remains mine.

Most discussions about AI focus on replacing people. I believe that is the wrong conversation. The real opportunity is enabling people.

SMEs have never lacked expertise. What we often lack is capacity.

Unlike large organizations, we cannot always solve challenges by adding more personnel. Every hire matters. Every overhead matters. Every decision has a direct impact on growth.

Yet SMEs possess advantages that large organizations often struggle to replicate: agility, speed of decision-making, entrepreneurial thinking, and the ability to rapidly form strategic partnerships with highly specialized experts.

AI amplifies those advantages.

For SMEs, AI becomes even more powerful when combined with strategic partnerships, allowing small organizations to access world-class expertise while maintaining agility and focus.

It allows a small team to operate with greater reach, greater visibility, and greater analytical capability than would otherwise be possible.

It has not replaced expertise.

In fact, it has amplified it.

One of the most significant benefits I have experienced is the ability to mine information more effectively.

Business leaders spend years accumulating knowledge, lessons learned, project experiences, market intelligence, and strategic insights. Yet much of that knowledge becomes fragmented across emails, reports, spreadsheets, notebooks, and conversations.

One of the most underrated benefits of AI is organizational continuity.

Ideas no longer disappear into forgotten folders. Previous analyses can be revisited. Project discussions can be recalled. Lessons learned can be reused. Market intelligence can be connected across seemingly unrelated activities.

Instead of constantly creating another wheel, AI helps surface information that already exists and allows teams to build upon previous work rather than repeatedly starting from scratch.

For an SME, that is incredibly powerful.

More recently, I have started introducing AI-assisted workflows and specialized AI assistants into our business environment.

They have names.

They have designated functions.

They support research, analysis, organization, and information management.

- They are not employees.
- They are not decision-makers.
- They operate under human direction and control.

However, they are becoming valuable contributors to an increasingly AI-enabled organization. What excites me most is that this capability is not reserved for multinational corporations.

- AI is not a big-company privilege.
- A small engineering company can leverage AI.
- A consulting firm can leverage AI.
- A logistics company can leverage AI.
- A startup can leverage AI.

In many respects, SMEs may be better positioned than large corporations because they can adopt new ways of working without navigating layers of bureaucracy and organizational resistance.

At the same time, AI raises important strategic questions.

Recent discussions around restrictions being placed on certain advanced AI capabilities due to national security concerns highlight an issue that businesses should be thinking about now.

What happens when critical knowledge, workflows, and institutional memory become dependent on platforms that organizations do not own or control?

- What happens if access changes?
- What happens if geopolitical considerations influence availability?
- What happens if years of accumulated business intelligence become locked behind systems outside our control?

These are not reasons to avoid AI.

However, they are reasons to think carefully about governance, resilience, data ownership, and knowledge management as AI becomes more deeply integrated into our organizations.

For SMEs, this may become one of the most important leadership discussions of the next decade.

The future will not belong exclusively to the largest companies. It will belong to organizations that combine expertise, agility, partnerships, and technology in smarter ways.

For me, AI has become more than a productivity tool.

It has become an enabler.

An accelerator.

A coach.

And perhaps most importantly, a reminder that the competitive gap between large organizations and SMEs may be narrowing faster than many people realize.

It is important to be clear about one thing.

AI did not create the company we are today.

The foundations of TSAVO were built long before AI entered my professional life. Our technical expertise, entrepreneurial culture, strategic partnerships, and willingness to pursue opportunities across multiple sectors had already been established.

What AI has done is help organize, connect, accelerate, and amplify those capabilities. It has enabled me and my team to access information faster, identify patterns more effectively, and execute with greater speed and confidence.

In many ways, **AI did not change our DNA.**

It helped us express it more fully.

Today, I believe AI may be one of the most important opportunities SMEs have ever been given to compete above their weight. But tools alone do not build businesses.

- Expertise builds businesses.
- Relationships build businesses.
- Reputation builds businesses.
- Persistence builds businesses.

AI simply allows those strengths to travel further, move faster, and create impact at a scale that many SMEs could previously only imagine.

Question: *Has AI become part of your business strategy, or are you still viewing it primarily as a productivity tool? I would be interested to hear how other SMEs are approaching this transition.*



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Author's Note:

Every journey has a starting point.

Mine began with two cousins, **Ben Schouten (Netherlands)** and **Fanuel McCarthy (USA)**, who took the time to introduce me to Artificial Intelligence and ChatGPT in late 2025. What seemed

like a simple conversation at the time has since transformed how I think, learn, lead, and build businesses.

The DNA of TSAVO was already there. The ambition was already there. The expertise, partnerships, and entrepreneurial spirit were already there. AI simply helped me see new possibilities and amplify what already existed.

For that introduction—and for opening my world to the possibilities of AI, I remain deeply grateful.

Thank you, Ben and Fanuel.

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