

# The Guide to **AI** for Founders. 2026 Edition.

The truth about what AI can and cannot do for your business in 2026. Written for the founder who is busy and tired of being sold to.



IF WE HAVE NOT MET

# An intro before **we get into it.**

My name is **Sutton Huggins**. I run two companies: **Ascend Performance Nutrition** and **Helion**. I also hold strategic positions in other companies.

Ascend is a DTC supplement brand. Helion is the AI infrastructure agency I built so other founders could install the same system I use to run Ascend.

Helion is not selling software. Helion is not selling a course. **Helion installs the AI system your business runs on, custom for your stack.**

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This document is for the founder who keeps hearing about AI and is tired of being lied to about it. It is short. It is direct. It will save you from buying something stupid.

## **Five minutes. Read it.**

WHAT IS BEING SOLD TO YOU RIGHT NOW

# One question exposes **every** fake AI guru.

Walk into LinkedIn, Twitter, or any community. Count how many people are calling themselves an AI expert this month. Most of them do not know what they are talking about.

ASK ANY ONE OF THEM



**What is the difference between a tool, a workflow, and an agent?**

If they cannot answer that clearly, they do not know how AI works. They are selling you a thing they cannot explain.

Most "AI experts" call their stack a "**platform**," a "**proprietary AI**," or an "**agent**." The next few pages show you what's actually under the hood, and how to evaluate anyone selling you AI.

## THE INTELLIGENCE LAYER

# There are only **three AI companies.** The rest are wrappers.

Three companies in the world actually build frontier AI models.  
Everything else is a wrapper.

ANTHROPIC

## Claude

Strongest at coding, reasoning, and structured output. Helion runs on this.

OPENAI

## ChatGPT · Codex

The mainstream model. Strong general-purpose, weaker on engineering reliability.

GOOGLE

## Gemini

Strong on multimodal and long context. Tightly tied to Google's ecosystem.

### When you buy from a wrapper, you are buying

- **Their interface** · the website or app you log into
- **Their prompts** · the instructions they send to the backend
- **Their skills** · the workflows they have wired up

The intelligence, the part that actually thinks, is rented from one of the big three. The best builders in the world build on top of these models. The problem is when a wrapper calls itself "proprietary AI" to hide that fact. Ask which model is on the backend. If they dodge, walk away.

THE RAMP AI INDEX

# The best model right now is Claude.

Ramp tracks AI spending across tens of thousands of US businesses. The shift in 2025 was real, fast, and sustained.

#1

ENTERPRISE SPEND SHARE

PER THE RAMP AI INDEX · 2025

**Anthropic's Claude overtook OpenAI's ChatGPT in enterprise spend share in 2025. The gap has widened every quarter since.**

Most serious builders are picking Claude. Helion runs on it.

## The Wrapper Tax

When you pay \$99/mo for an "AI tool" built on Claude, you are paying for the wrapper. The wrapper is paying Anthropic for the model. **You are paying twice.**

A custom install gets you onto the model directly, at the cost of running the model, not the wrapper's markup.

WHY CLAUDE WON THE ENTERPRISE SIDE

# Four reasons it pulled ahead. **All four matter.**

01

## Stronger coding and reasoning.

Production AI infrastructure lives or dies on whether the model can write correct code and follow multi-step logic. Claude leads here.

02

## Longer context windows.

The system holds more of your business in memory on a single call. Less prompt-juggling. Sharper outputs.

03

## Reliable structured output.

Tool calls in an agent only work if the model returns predictable structured data. Claude is the most reliable here.

04

## Fewer edge-case hallucinations.

The discipline that keeps dashboard numbers honest. Wrong numbers cost real money. Claude is the safer bet.

## THE FRAMEWORK

# Three layers. Most "AI experts" can't name them.

Once you can, you'll spot a fake in 30 seconds.

## 1 A tool is one thing that does one job.

A tool that writes an email when you tell it to. A tool that pulls your Shopify revenue. A tool that generates an image. One thing. One job. A tool by itself is a knife on a counter. You still have to do the cooking.

↓ Chain them

## 2 A workflow is a chain of tools that do one bigger job.

Pull Shopify revenue, then Klaviyo opens, then write a summary email at 8 AM every morning. Three tools chained. One bigger job. More useful than a tool. Still dumb. It does the same chain every time. It cannot think.

↓ Add a brain

## 3 An agent is the brain that decides which tools and workflows to use.

You say "we are losing customers in Florida, figure out why." The agent picks the right tools. Runs the right workflows. Brings you the answer. If the first try does not work, it tries something else.

THE RULE ALMOST NOBODY GETS RIGHT

A tool is only as good as **the workflow** it lives in.

A workflow is only as good as **the tools** it has.

An agent is only as good as **both**.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN YOUR BUSINESS

# Same business problem. Three different answers.

**TOOL**

**An AI that writes a single email when you paste a prompt in.** You drive every input. You evaluate every output. The tool is fast but it cannot remember anything between sessions.

**WORKFLOW**

**Every Tuesday at 9 AM, pull last week's top-selling product, generate a launch email in your brand voice, stage it in Klaviyo for your review.** Three tools chained. Repeatable. Useful. Still dumb. It will run the same chain even if the answer doesn't apply this week.

**AGENT**

**"Revenue is down 12% week-over-week. Figure out why and fix it."** The agent pulls Shopify, checks Meta spend, reads Klaviyo flow performance, identifies that the abandoned cart flow stopped firing 9 days ago, fixes the trigger, and writes you a one-paragraph brief on what happened.

If your "AI" is one tool on a website, that's not infrastructure. That's a knife on a counter. If the vendor can't explain this difference, **they can sell you a knife and call it a kitchen.**

## VIBE CODED VS. ENGINEERED

# Two ways software gets built. Only one survives.

Top builders use AI to write software too. Claude Code is in the hands of the best engineers in the world. The AI is not the problem. The difference is who is driving.

## THE VIBE CODER

### Uses the AI as a crutch.

Cannot read the code. Cannot edit it. Can only describe what they want in plain English and hope the AI gets it right. When it does not, they prompt again. Each round is slower. The result is worse. The wiring underneath is held together with tape.

## REAL TECHNICAL DEPTH

### Uses the AI like a power tool.

Reads the code the AI produces. Makes manual edits where it matters. Guides the AI with technical precision because they understand what the code is doing under the hood. Ships faster than writing by hand. Still engineered.

### The bar is depth, not pedigree

You do not need an MIT degree to ship engineered software. You need enough technical literacy to read, edit, and guide the code instead of begging the AI to interpret you. Vibe coding is fine for a weekend project. It is not fine for a tool your business runs on.

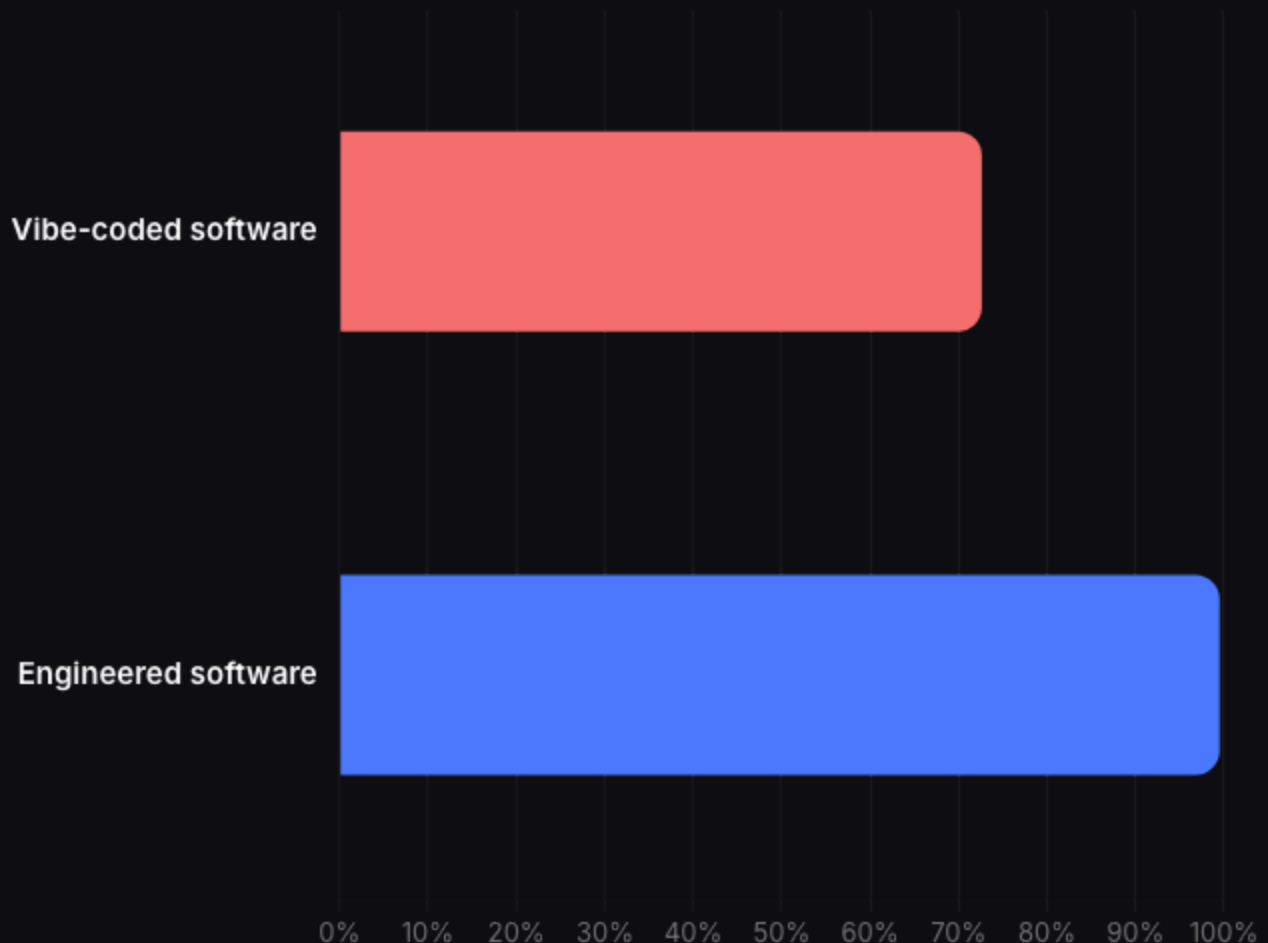
THE PROOF IN THE NUMBERS

# When real work hits, **vibe-coded** software breaks.

The single most common failure point: dashboard numbers that do not match the source of truth. Engineered software refuses to lie. Vibe-coded software guesses with confidence.

## Dashboard parity with Shopify admin

% OF NUMBERS THAT MATCH THE SOURCE OF TRUTH · HIGHER IS HONEST



## THE REAL TECHNICAL SKILL

# Writing prompts is the surface. Setting the environment is the work.

The skill is not writing the right prompt. The skill is building the right **folder structure and environment** for the model to work in.

## A real system has

- A clear file structure the model can navigate
- Context files that describe the project, the data, and the brand
- Tool definitions the AI can call reliably
- Reference docs the model reads before it writes a line
- A clean separation between what the AI does, what your business does, and where your data lives

## The vibe coder approach

Opens a chat window. Starts describing what they want. The AI tries to guess at context it does not have. Each prompt is a fresh start. Nothing compounds.

## The output quality difference

Is enormous. And it is not the model's fault. **It is the environment.** Most "AI for business" tools fail not because the model is weak. They fail because the environment is thin.

## THE 5-MINUTE AI VENDOR TEST

# Four questions. Fail any one, walk away.

## 01

**"Explain the difference between a tool, a workflow, and an agent."**

If they can't, they don't understand the category they sell in.

## 02

**"Which model is on the backend? Claude, Gemini, or ChatGPT?"**

If they dodge or claim "proprietary," they are hiding the wrapper.

## 03

**"When the AI writes the code wrong, can the builder read it and fix it by hand?"**

If they can only re-prompt, they are vibe coding.  
If they can open the file and edit the line, the software is engineered.

## 04

**"Show me your dashboard next to my real Shopify admin. Do the numbers match exactly?"**

If they don't match, the system is lying to you with confidence.

Bad numbers lead to bad decisions. Bad decisions stack up into bad months. The vendors who skip the boring engineering hurt you in ways you don't see until it's already cost you.

WHERE YOUR HOURS ACTUALLY GO

# Six places your week is bleeding hours.

Read these as a self-diagnostic. Wherever you're nodding, that's where an install would start.

## The morning dashboard hop

30-45 min/day pulling Shopify, Meta, Klaviyo, GA.  
**Replaced by** one 8 AM brief: yesterday's revenue, top product, top ad, what broke, what to do.

## The blank-page email problem

90 min to write a draft you delete twice. **Replaced by** emails drafted in your voice from your products, staged in Klaviyo. You hit send.

## The ad creative grind

Budget burned on variants that don't move the needle.  
**Replaced by** brand-voice variants named for Meta to teach back what works.

## The CS ticket pile

2-3 hours/day in the inbox. **Replaced by** tickets read, categorized, drafted in your voice. You skim. You send.

## The content treadmill

You stop showing up after week three. **Replaced by** weekly batches for LinkedIn, X, Threads, IG from your voice and your data.

## The stock-out panic

11 PM Sunday realization. **Replaced by** Shopify watched against reorder thresholds. Warned before fire drill.

THE HOURS MATH

# 36 hours back, every week.

Estimated time recovered per workflow on a full install. Your business will vary, but the order of magnitude does not.

## Hours per week recovered by workflow

FOUNDER TIME BACK · ESTIMATED FROM REAL INSTALLS



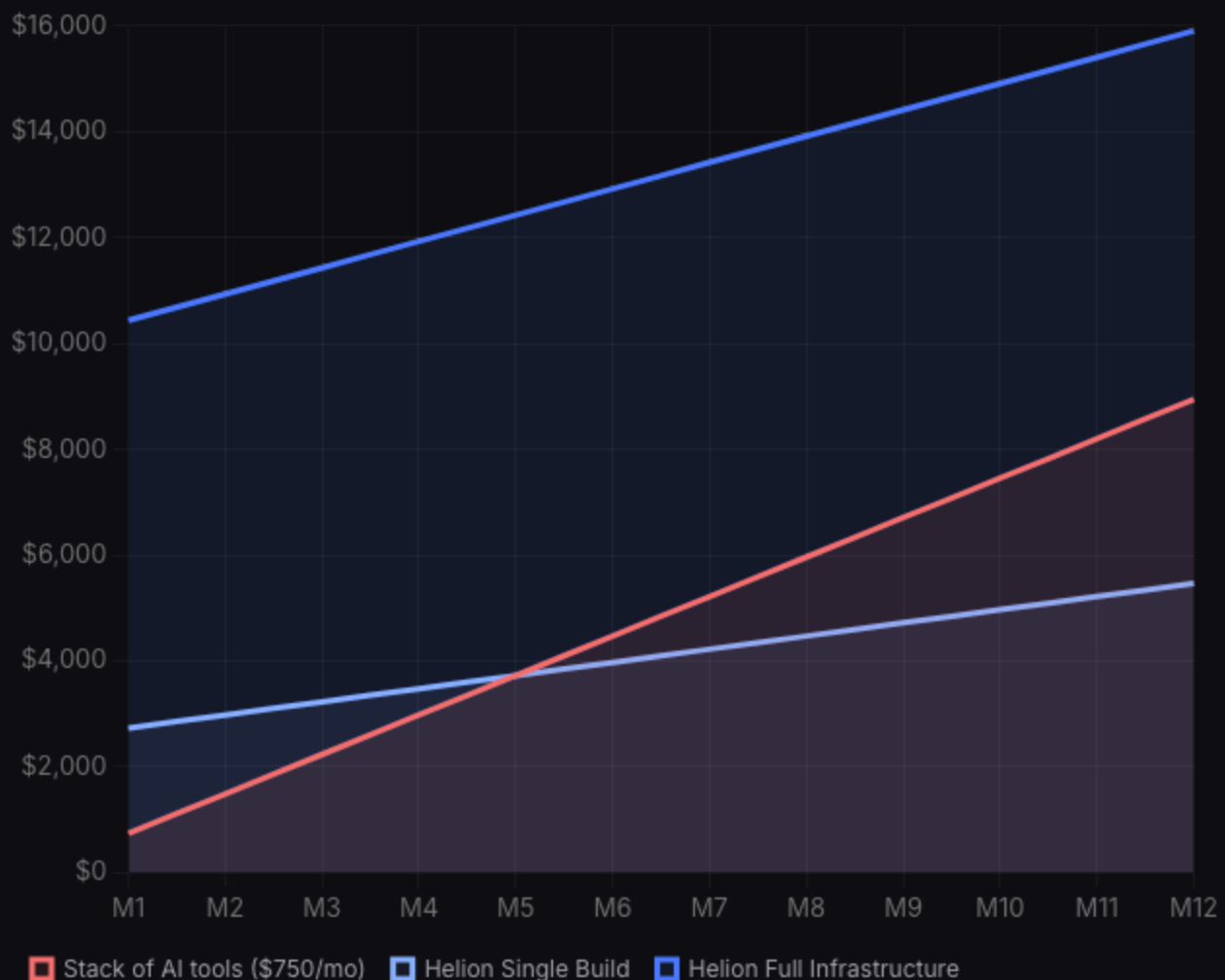
THE COST MATH

# An install pays itself back. A subscription never stops.

A single-tool subscription compounds every month for the life of your business. A Helion install is paid once. You own the system.

## Year 1 cost: AI tool subscription vs. Helion install

CUMULATIVE COST OVER 12 MONTHS · LOWER IS BETTER



## THE REAL LIMIT OF AI

# The pitch says AI can do everything. The truth is more useful.

AI is only as good as the **context** you give it.

Drop a generic prompt into ChatGPT and you get generic output. Drop the same prompt into a system that knows your products, your customers, your brand voice, your margin structure, and your last 12 months of campaign performance, and you get something that looks like **you wrote it**.

Most "AI for business" tools fail because they are running on thin context. The model is not the bottleneck. **The context layer is.**

## Where you still want a human in the loop

- **The final strategic call.** The system runs the analysis. You make the call.
- **Brand taste.** The system mimics your voice. You set the editorial direction.
- **High-emotion customer escalations.** Refunds, complaints, the moments where a human voice changes the outcome.
- **Brand-new launches with zero prior data.** The first cycle needs your eyes. Once it sees real performance, it sharpens fast.

SAVE YOURSELF TIME

# This is not for everyone.

**If you want a \$50/month tool that does one thing and feels modern.**

Buy the tool. Move on. That is not what Helion builds.

**If you trust the AI guru who could not answer the four-question vendor test.**

Stay with him. You will get what you pay for.

**If you are still reading.**

You are the right reader. Turn the page.

ONE LAST THING

**You can keep scrolling  
posts  
from people who cannot  
explain  
the difference between a  
tool,  
a workflow, and an agent.**

Or you can walk into a room where the work happens live  
every week.

Door is open. Bring a friend who is tired of being sold to.

[skool.com/aihq](https://skool.com/aihq) →

FREE. NO UPSSELL ON THE WAY IN.

## Thank you for reading.

If something in this document changed how you think about AI in your business, that was the point. Helion exists to install the AI system your business runs on, custom for your stack. If that's what you need, we should talk. If it's not, the free community at [skool.com/aihq](https://skool.com/aihq) is where the work happens in the open.

