THE RISE SERIES · The new era of business technology

FIG. 01 · THE VISION, RENDERED

R.I.S.E.

The New Era of Business Technology.

Why the future belongs to businesses that are **Resilient, Integrated, Secure, and Evolving** with AI, and how a pioneer helps you become one.

PUBLISHED BY
Solution Builders · www.solutionbuilders.com

RESILIENT · INTEGRATED · SECURE · EVOLVING
Your technology pioneer for what comes next

THE VISION · Twenty pages that change how you see your business

Everything changed. Now everything is possible.

The pandemic did not just disrupt business. It revealed what business technology was always supposed to be. This is the story of what changed, the proof behind it, and the vision Solution Builders has carried for years, a new era that is **Resilient, Integrated, Secure, and Evolving** with AI.

R	**I**	**S**	**E**
Resilient	**Integrated**	**Secure**	**Evolving**
Cloud, continuity, backup	Infrastructure, services	Cybersecurity	AI

THE TURNING POINT

A new era never asks for permission.

Think back to early 2020. In a matter of days, offices around the world went dark. Teams scattered. Customers still expected answers. Every business on earth took the same pop quiz at the same moment, can you operate when everything changes overnight?

Some companies froze. Others barely broke stride. They opened laptops at kitchen tables, joined the morning huddle on video, and kept every promise to their customers. The difference was not luck, and it was not size. It was architecture.

That season became a turning point. It forced every owner and every leader to look at their business differently, and to accept a truth the best technology minds had been saying for years. Your business is not a building. It is not a server in a closet. It is a living system of people, data, and workflows, and that system either bends or it breaks.

We believe that shock was not the end of something. It was the beginning of something far greater. A new era of business technology has arrived, and it has a name. That name is **RISE**.

Nothing kills momentum like an interruption

Growth is a streak. Every shipped project, every won client, every good quarter builds on the last one. The companies that recover fastest are never the biggest or the richest. They are the ones that planned to be interrupted, and built for it. That belief sits underneath every page of this book.

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

The world took the test. Work never went back.

The pandemic compressed a decade of change into a single season. Digital adoption leapt years ahead in months, the cloud became the default, and the office became a thing you do, not a place you go. The numbers tell the story better than we ever could.

3 to 7 yrs

How far the pandemic accelerated digitization of operations and products, in a matter of months

MCKINSEY GLOBAL SURVEY

90%+

of organizations now run workloads in the cloud, the anywhere foundation

FLEXERA STATE OF THE CLOUD

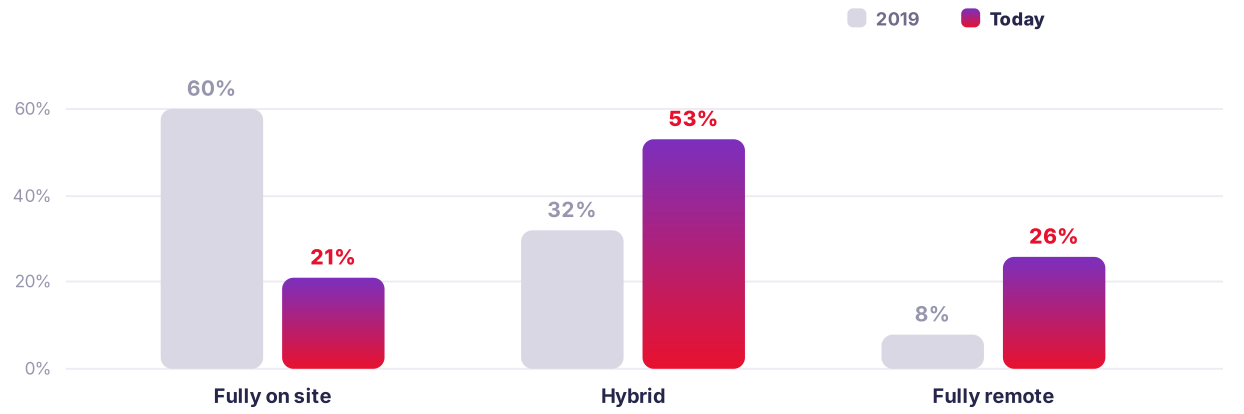
98%

of workers now want the option to work remotely at least part of the time

BUFFER STATE OF REMOTE WORK

WHERE REMOTE CAPABLE EMPLOYEES WORK

US · GALLUP



Sources: McKinsey Global Survey on digital adoption, Flexera State of the Cloud Report, Buffer State of Remote Work, Gallup hybrid work indicator. Figures rounded.

THE LESSONS OF 2020

What the shock actually proved.

The office is optional. The business is not.

Companies already in the cloud switched to remote work in days, not months. Their people opened laptops at home and kept serving clients while competitors scrambled for licenses.

Adaptation speed is a competitive weapon.

Video calls, team chat, and shared documents went from nice to have to the whole company overnight. The tools existed for years. The winners had already adopted them.

Flexibility attracts talent.

More than half of remote capable employees now work hybrid. A business built for anywhere work hires from anywhere, and keeps the people it has.

The next disruption will look different.

Nobody gets to pick their crisis. A resilient business does not predict the future, it simply refuses to depend on any single place, device, or server.

40%

of small businesses never reopen after a natural disaster

FEMA

25%

of those that do reopen still fail within one year

FEMA

$9K

average cost of downtime per minute for a modern business

PONEMON INSTITUTE

The simplest test of readiness we know

If your building disappeared tonight, could your team work tomorrow morning? If the answer is yes, your momentum is protected. If the answer is no, keep reading, this entire book is your roadmap.

HOW WE GOT HERE

For thirty years, technology set the rules. Not anymore.

When the first computers and networks arrived in businesses, they could only do so much. So owners did the smart thing, the only thing, and designed their processes around those limitations. Orders got printed because the system could not send them. Data got rekeyed because the systems could not talk. The limitations quietly became the process, and the process quietly became the culture.

Then technology started improving fast, and businesses kept up the only way a busy business can, piecemeal. A new server here, a new app there, one sensible upgrade at a time for thirty years. We call the result **Frankenstein technology**, a creature stitched together from reasonable decisions, that all works, and none of which works together.

Here is the part that changes everything. There are now **millions of softwares and peripherals**, and for the first time in history, the technology is no longer the limitation. With the right architect, with the right solution builder, you can have an environment designed around **your vision** of how your business should run, one that reaches your desired outcomes faster and more cost effectively than you ever thought possible.

THE OLD QUESTION

“What can the technology do?”

The business bends around the tools, and the workarounds become the way of working.

THE NEW QUESTION

“How do you want your business to work?”

The environment is designed around your vision, and the outcomes arrive faster.

The question flipped, and the new era began

The businesses pulling ahead right now are rarely the ones with the most technology. They are the ones whose technology was designed on purpose, around the way they actually want to work.

THE MONSTER TIMELINE

Thirty years of stitches, one fork in the road.

1995

The Beige Era

The first server, the first network, the first login. Technology can only do a few things, so every process gets designed around what it cannot do.

2005

The Black Tower Era

The server closet grows into a rack. Software gets installed machine by machine. New hardware, same old processes, the first real maintenance burden.

2013

Half in the Cloud

Email moves to the cloud, some files follow, some stay behind. The business now lives in two worlds at once, and the stitching between them is manual.

2019

The SaaS Explosion

Every team swipes a card and downloads its own solution. Critical data starts living in apps the organization is not even aware of.

2020

The Wake Up Call

The pandemic sends everyone home overnight and grades thirty years of decisions in a single week. Architecture becomes destiny.

Today

The Fork in the Road

Old and new side by side, held together by habits and hope. For the first time ever, the technology exists to design your way out. This is where RISE begins.

ANATOMY OF THE PATCHWORK

It all works. It just does not work together.

Nobody is to blame, and everybody is paying for it. Every stitch on the monster was a rational decision made by a smart person solving that day's problem. From the inside it does not look like a monster. It looks like Tuesday. From the outside, the numbers are hard to ignore.



130+

SaaS applications running inside the average company, most never mapped

BETTERCLOUD

28%

of business applications are actually integrated. The rest work alone

MULESOFT CONNECTIVITY BENCHMARK

30 to 40%

of technology spending now happens outside the IT department, in the shadows

GARTNER

68%

of the data available to businesses never gets analyzed or used at all

SEAGATE AND IDC RETHINK DATA

1,200

times per day the average worker toggles between apps and websites

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

4 hrs

lost per person, per week, simply reorienting after switching tools

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

$12.9M

average yearly cost of poor data quality per organization, silos lead the list

GARTNER

You cannot patch a design problem

Frankenstein does not need another upgrade bolted on. He needs a blueprint. Every unmapped app is a door, every manual handoff is a crack, and the patchwork is not just expensive, it is exposed.

THE COST OF STANDING STILL

Waiting is the most expensive strategy.

Damage compounds exactly the way growth does. A single incident can erase months of progress in an afternoon, and the climb back is always slower than the fall. Here is what the wait actually costs.

$4.44M
global average cost of a single data breach
IBM COST OF A DATA BREACH 2025

241
average days just to identify and contain a breach
IBM 2025

24 days
average downtime after ransomware without a recovery plan
STATISTA, COVEWARE

61%
of small and midsize businesses reported a breach in the past year
PREVEIL 2025

THE COST CURVE OF WAITING

ILLUSTRATIVE



Prevention is a plan. Recovery is a guarantee.

Organizations with solid, tested backups got their encrypted data back after ransomware 97 percent of the time, and teams using AI and automation in defense saved an average of 1.9 million dollars per breach. The math has never favored waiting less.

Sources: IBM Cost of a Data Breach 2025, Statista and Coveware ransomware research, PreVeil SMB security research, Sophos State of Ransomware.

WORKFLOW FIRST DESIGN

Design backwards from the outcome.

Here is the flip that defines the new era. Instead of asking what technology can do and bending the business around the answer, a true pioneer sits down with the owner and asks a better question, in a perfect world, how would work flow through this company? Then the entire environment gets designed backwards from that answer, supporting the desired workflow and reaching the desired outcomes faster and more cost effectively.

70%

of technology transformations fall short, usually because tools were bought before workflows were designed

MCKINSEY

40%+

of workers spend at least a quarter of their week on manual, repetitive tasks a designed environment would erase

SMARTSHEET

14+ hrs

per person, per week, returned when rekeying, hunting, switching, and manual reporting are handled by design

PUBLISHED TASK RESEARCH, ILLUSTRATIVE

THE WORKFLOW FIRST DESIGN LOOP

01

Map the ideal workflow

Sit with leadership and chart how work should move through the business.

02

Audit everything you run

Every app, server, and subscription, shadows included, on one map.

03

Design the environment

Keep what serves the vision, retire what does not, connect the rest.

04

Integrate, secure, support

Bridge the data, protect every connection, manage it all as one.

You stop buying instruments and start hearing music

A hundred instruments do not make an orchestra. A conductor does. When the environment is designed as one, your applications work together instead of side by side, your data points talk to each other instead of hiding in silos, and the network stays protected because security was in the blueprint, not bolted on after.

RISE · The four pillars of the new era

One word. Four pillars. A whole new world.

RISE is not a product and it is not a package. It is a way of building a business for the era we are already in. Each pillar stands on its own, and together they hold up something none of them can alone, unstoppable momentum.

R

Resilient

Cloud, flexible infrastructure, business continuity, and data backup. A business that runs from anywhere, at any time, on any device, and never lets a bad day steal its momentum.

I

Integrated

Integrations, infrastructure, and professional services. One designed environment where every application works together and every data point feeds one source of truth.

S

Secure

Cybersecurity as a framework, not a product. Layered defense woven through the foundation and every connection above it, keeping momentum unbreakable.

E

Evolving

Artificial intelligence. Agents and copilots that multiply your people, built on a foundation that is ready for them, and for whatever comes next.

RISE · R is for Resilient

Run from anywhere. Survive anything.

A resilient business runs from anywhere, at any time, on any device. It has redundancy where it matters, backups it can trust, and communication that follows people instead of desks. Pandemics, storms, outages, hardware failures, human error, the threat changes, but the answer stays the same, build a business that bends without breaking.

$9K

average cost of downtime per minute, the price of a fragile design

PONEMON INSTITUTE

97%

of organizations with solid, tested backups recovered their data after ransomware

SOPHOS

53%

of remote capable US employees now work hybrid, resilience is also a talent strategy

GALLUP

The anywhere principle

If your building disappeared tonight, could your team work tomorrow morning? A resilient business answers yes without hesitating, because its apps, files, desktops, and phone system live in the cloud and follow its people everywhere.

Go deeper The full story, chapter by chapter, in **Book One, Built Resilient**

RISE · I is for Integrated

A pile of tools is not a strategy.

The businesses pulling ahead are rarely the ones with the most technology. They are the ones whose technology, data, and applications are integrated on purpose, designed around the way the business actually wants to work, protected at every connection, and feeding one source of truth. That is the difference between owning instruments and hearing music.

28%

of business applications are integrated today. The rest work alone, and cost you daily

MULESOFT

23×

more likely to acquire customers, companies with a real data culture see opportunities first

MCKINSEY

19×

more likely to be profitable, because pricing, staffing, and spending run on evidence

MCKINSEY

One source of truth

Data bridges link every platform into your main line of business system, securely and in both directions. No exports, no rekeying, no waiting on the one person who knows where the file lives. When the data starts talking to itself, leaders stop guessing.

Go deeper — The full story, chapter by chapter, in **Book Two, Built Integrated**

RISE · S is for Secure

Security is the floor everything stands on.

The companies that get hit hardest are rarely the ones with the weakest tools. They are the ones who treated security as a project with an end date. Real security is a framework, built into the foundation and woven through everything above it, endpoints, detection, recovery, testing, and the human firewall, all working as one.

90%+

of account attacks are blocked by multi factor authentication alone

MICROSOFT SECURITY RESEARCH

60%

of breaches involve a human action, which training and smart access rules help catch

VERIZON DBIR 2025

$1.9M

average saved per breach by teams using AI and automation in defense

IBM 2025

No single tool saves you. Layers do.

Picture your business as a fortress with rings of protection around what matters most. An attacker has to beat every ring. You only have to make any one of them hold. That is defense in depth, and it is the whole case for a framework over a product.

Go deeper The full story, chapter by chapter, in **Book Three, Built Secure**

RISE · E is for Evolving

AI is not coming. It is already on payroll.

Forget the science fiction. The useful version of AI is already sitting in your inbox, your spreadsheets, and your support queue, and it just made the leap from tools that answer to agents that act. The teams that adopt it compound their advantage year after year, while everyone else inches along.

1.5 hrs

freed per person, every single week, with AI in the daily workflow

FORRESTER TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT

4.5x

three year return on AI investment reported for small business

FORRESTER

60 sec

from blank page to a solid first draft, on day one

THE AI ADVANTAGE, BOOK FOUR

The E sits on top of the other three

AI is a force multiplier on a foundation that is Resilient, Integrated, and Secure. Get those right and it transforms the business. Skip them and it becomes a fast way to make expensive mistakes. That order of operations is the whole point of RISE.

Go deeper — The full story, chapter by chapter, in **Book Four, The AI Advantage**

THE GROWTH GAP

Standing still is not staying even. It is falling behind.

The businesses that adopt the RISE way compound their advantage, faster answers become faster projects, faster projects become happier clients, and the gap widens every single year. Here is that gap, indexed to today.



23×
more likely to acquire customers with a real data culture
MCKINSEY

19×
more likely to be profitable when decisions run on evidence
MCKINSEY

6×
more likely to retain the customers you already have
MCKINSEY

Illustrative model indexed to 100 at year zero, showing the compounding effect of sustained adoption versus none. Your results depend on adoption, data quality, and use case. Multipliers per McKinsey data culture research.

PROJECTIONS, THE DECADE AHEAD

The road ahead only moves one direction.

Every era of business technology arrived faster than the one before it. Notice the gaps getting shorter, that acceleration is the whole point, and the reason a business built on RISE is built to evolve rather than to catch up.

2020	2022	2026	2030
The overnight test	AI meets everyone	The age of agents	Designed by default

NOW

The age of agents

AI stops just answering and starts doing. Agents draft, research, reconcile, and follow up inside the guardrails you set.

NEXT

Multimodal and personal

Technology that sees, hears, and speaks, tuned to your business, your data, and your voice.

SOON

Everything designed

Environments assembled around outcomes as naturally as buildings are designed around people.

HORIZON

A quantum peek

A leap in raw computing power that will one day train models impossible today. No panic, no rush, stay curious and keep your data tidy.

You do not have to predict the future. You have to be ready for it.

Nobody knows exactly which wave arrives next. A business built on RISE does not need to know. Its foundation absorbs change, its environment is designed to evolve, and every new capability lands as a multiplier instead of a migration.

THE WORD THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

Partner versus pioneer. Know the difference.

Every provider in the world calls itself a partner. It is not a bad word, it is just not enough anymore. It does not speak to the innovation this era demands, and it does not describe the responsibility that comes with leading businesses into it. Here is the honest difference.

	A PARTNER	A PIONEER
Mindset	Keeps the lights on	**Builds the road ahead**
Starting point	Your current tools and tickets	**Your vision and your desired outcomes**
When they show up	After something breaks	**Before the world changes**
What they sell	Products and hours	**A designed environment and outcomes**
Relationship to change	Reacts to it	**Creates it**
How success is measured	Tickets closed, uptime maintained	**Outcomes reached, momentum protected**
Approach to security	A product bolted on	**A framework woven through everything**
Approach to AI	A license added to the stack	**A multiplier built on a ready foundation**
The result	You keep up	**You rise**

THE OBLIGATION

The best MSPs do not maintain the old world. They pioneer the new one.

Solution Builders has spent thirty years in this work, and today we stand among the top one percent of managed service providers in the world. We believe that standing carries an obligation, to create the new world, to build the infrastructure of the new business era, and to guide our clients into it so they can grow and thrive in ways they never thought possible.

That is what the pages ahead deliver. They break down what Resilient, Integrated, Secure, and Evolving really mean, with real business cases behind every claim. And more than anything, they are an invitation, to take a step into the new world, to rethink everything, and to see what your business is truly, truly capable of.

We are here to help you do it. We are here to help you embrace all the wonderful change ahead, and to reach your desired outcomes more quickly and more cost effectively than you ever imagined. Welcome to RISE.

The Solution Builders Team
2026 MSP 501 Top Managed Service Provider · Bloomington, Minnesota

30+
Years building technology environments for growing businesses

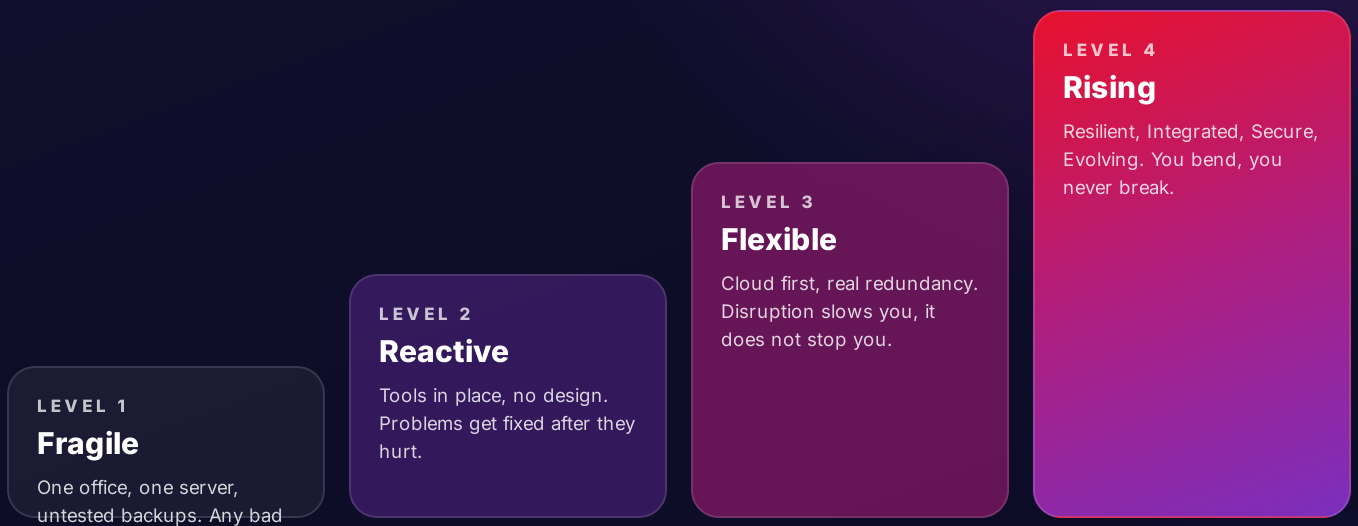
Top 1%
Among managed service providers worldwide, MSP 501 honored

One.
Vision for the new era, Resilient, Integrated, Secure, Evolving

WHERE DO YOU STAND

The RISE maturity ladder.

Most businesses sit on the second rung and do not know it. They own tools, so they feel covered, but owning a generator is not the same as knowing it starts. The goal is the top rung, where a disruption is a manageable event, not an existential one, and where every new technology lands as a multiplier.



MOST BUSINESSES ARE HERE ↑ LEVEL 2, AND THE CLIMB IS FASTER THAN THEY THINK

RISE ONE FOUNDATION › **Efficient** HOURS RETURNED › **Trusted** CLIENTS AND TALENT › **Momentum** UNSTOPPABLE

How Solution Builders moves you up the ladder

We start with an honest assessment of where you stand, then design the climb, cloud where it counts, bridges where they matter, security woven through every connection, and AI on top of a foundation that is ready for it. Modern, flexible, and built around your workflow, not the other way around.

THE INVITATION

Take the trip. Take the step. See what your business is truly capable of.

The vision ends here, and the proof begins. Four complete books follow, one for each pillar, packed with the business cases, the frameworks, and the checklists that turn RISE from a word into your operating reality. And when you are ready, the first ninety days look like this.

DAYS 1 TO 30

Discover

Inventory every app, server, and subscription, shadows included. Sit with leadership and map the ideal workflow. Name the source of truth.

DAYS 31 TO 60

Design

Draw the blueprint. Decide what stays, what goes, and what gets replaced. Plan every bridge with security written into each one.

DAYS 61 TO 90

Deliver

Build the first bridges, retire the first duplicates, stand up the first dashboard, and train the team. Momentum takes over from there.

Turn the page

Book One begins with the pillar everything else stands on, a business that bends without breaking. Read straight through, or jump to the pillar that hurts the most. Every road leads to the same place, a business that rises.

R **Resilient**
Cloud, continuity, backup

I **Integrated**
Infrastructure, services

S **Secure**
Cybersecurity

E **Evolving**
AI

WITH GRATITUDE

This book belongs to many hands.

To every hardworking soul at Solution Builders, the people who work tirelessly every single day to deliver an amazing experience for our customers, thank you. This vision is only real because you make it real.

To our founders, **Dan and Rachel Melling**, two wonderful human beings whose belief and encouragement inspired this book into existence.

To the Solution Builders leadership team, who gather every Wednesday to share ideas, challenge each other, and keep this business moving forward.

To my beautiful wife **Briana**, a teacher, my inspiration, and the person who challenges me to be better every day. And to my four wonderful boys, who make all of it matter.

To the extended Solution Builders family, to everyone who has ever helped me at GlassHive and in every business along the way, and to the mentors who trained me and shaped how I see this industry, including **Gary Beacham** and **Erick Simpson**. This book is a tribute to you.

And to the small business community, this book is our gift to you. May it make a big difference.

Giovanni Sanguily
Chief Marketing Officer, Solution Builders

INSIDE THIS EDITION

The vision, then four books. One unbreakable business.

The twenty page vision you just read is the map. The four books that follow are the territory. Read straight through, or jump to the pillar that hurts the most.

01 Built Resilient

R IS FOR RESILIENT

Why a modern business runs from anywhere, survives anything, and never lets a bad day steal its momentum.

- The wake up call
- Work from anywhere
- Always on
- Connected everywhere
- Resilient by design

02 Built Integrated

I IS FOR INTEGRATED

Why connected technology is the engine of the modern business, and how one designed environment turns a pile of tools into a seamless orchestra.

- Killing Frankenstein
- The workflow comes first
- Data bridges
- The integrated enterprise

03 Built Secure

S IS FOR SECURE

Why cybersecurity is the foundation every modern business stands on, and how a full framework keeps your momentum unbreakable.

- The foundation
- Harden every layer
- Test it before they do
- Your people are the perimeter

04 The AI Advantage

E IS FOR EVOLVING

How agents, copilots, and a little bit of nerve turn the same team into a faster, sharper, more profitable one.

- A short history of AI
- What AI does for business now
- Choosing your AI stack
- The future, and quantum

Practical, visual, and built to be read, not skimmed

Every book stands on real research, real business cases, and thirty years of experience in the field.

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

PART ONE

THE RISE SERIES · COMPLETE EDITION

RISE · R is for Resilient

Built Resilient.

A business that runs from anywhere, survives anything, and never lets a bad day steal its momentum.

R
Resilient
Cloud, continuity, backup

I
Integrated
Infrastructure, services

S
Secure
Cybersecurity

E
Evolving
AI

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

BOOK ONE
THE RISE SERIES

RISE · R is for Resilient

BUILT

Resilient.

Why a modern business runs from anywhere, survives anything, and never lets a bad day steal its momentum.

R	I	S	E
Resilient	Integrated	Secure	Evolving

RISE · R is for Resilient

Resilience is not a backup plan. It is the way modern business runs.

Think back to early 2020. In a matter of days, the office emptied out, and every business on earth got the same pop quiz, can you still operate when everything changes overnight? Some companies froze. Others barely noticed, they opened their laptops at the kitchen table, joined the morning huddle on video, and kept moving. The difference was not luck. It was architecture.

That is what the **R in RISE** stands for. A resilient business runs from **anywhere, at any time, on any device**. It has redundancy where it matters, backups it can trust, and communication that follows people instead of desks. Pandemics, storms, outages, hardware failures, human error, the threat changes, but the answer stays the same, build a business that bends without breaking.

R	I	S	E
Resilient	**Integrated**	**Secure**	**Evolving**
Cloud, continuity, backup	Infrastructure, services	Cybersecurity	AI

What you will take away from this book

Five chapters, one promise. By the last page you will know why downtime is the real enemy of growth, how anywhere operations actually work, what separates a backup from a recovery, how unified communication keeps teams in sync, and how to protect a business that no longer lives inside four walls. **Practical, visual, and built to be read, not skimmed.**

INSIDE THIS BOOK

Five chapters, one unbreakable business.

01 The Wake Up Call

Why disruption is a when, not an if, what downtime really costs, and the lesson 2020 taught every business on earth.

- The momentum killer
- The real cost of downtime
- Five ways businesses get knocked down

02 Work From Anywhere

Cloud, virtual desktops, and modern apps. How the office became a thing you do, not a place you go.

- The anywhere principle
- Old way vs anywhere way
- The anywhere stack

03 Always On

Backup, disaster recovery, and redundancy. The difference between a bad hour and a closed business.

- RTO and RPO decoded
- Layers of redundancy
- The continuity loop

04 Connected Everywhere

Unified communications and collaboration. One conversation across every device, channel, and time zone.

- App sprawl
- Unified communications
- Collaboration that compounds

05 Resilient By Design

Protecting a business with no walls. Identity, geofencing, device freedom, and the resilience maturity ladder.

- The perimeter moved
- Smart access rules
- The maturity ladder

CHAPTER 01

RESILIENT · THE RISE SERIES

01

The Wake Up Call.

Disruption stopped asking for permission. Pandemics, outages, storms, and simple bad luck all test the same thing, whether your business was built to keep moving.

CHAPTER 1 · THE STAKES

Downtime is not an inconvenience. It is a momentum killer.

Growth is a streak. Every shipped project, every won client, every good quarter builds on the last one. Then one morning the server will not start, or the building floods, or the whole world goes home for two years. The work stops, the phones go quiet, and the streak breaks. The companies that recover fastest are not the biggest or the richest. They are the ones that **planned to be interrupted**.

40%

of small businesses never reopen after a natural disaster

FEMA

25%

of those that do reopen fail within one year

FEMA

$9K

average cost of downtime per minute for a modern business

Ponemon Institute

WHAT 2020 ACTUALLY PROVED

The office is optional. The business is not.

Companies already running in the cloud switched to remote work in days, not months. Their people opened laptops at home and kept serving clients while competitors scrambled for VPN licenses.

Adaptation speed is a competitive weapon.

Video calls, team chat, and shared documents went from nice to have to the whole company overnight. The tools existed for years. The winners had already adopted them.

Flexibility attracts talent.

Today more than half of remote capable employees work hybrid. A business built for anywhere work hires from anywhere, and keeps the people it has.

The next disruption will look different.

Nobody gets to pick their crisis. A resilient business does not predict the future, it simply refuses to depend on any single place, device, or server.

Sources: FEMA small business disaster statistics, Ponemon Institute cost of downtime research, Gallup hybrid work indicator 2025.

Five ways a business gets knocked down.

Every one of these has ended a company that thought it could never happen to them. Notice the pattern in the right column, the answer is almost never a single product. It is a business designed to keep operating.

Disruption	What it looks like	How a resilient business answers
Pandemic or crisis	Offices close overnight, teams scatter, clients still expect answers	Cloud apps and virtual desktops, work moves home without missing a day
Natural disaster	Fire, flood, or storm takes out the building and everything in it	Data lives off site with tested recovery, the building is replaceable
Hardware failure	The one server everything runs on dies on a Tuesday morning	Redundancy at every layer, no single point of failure to fail
Cyberattack	Ransomware locks files and demands payment to get them back	Immutable backups and layered defense, restore instead of paying
Human error	One wrong click deletes a folder the whole company depends on	Versioned cloud storage and backup history, undo becomes possible

The anywhere principle

Here is the simplest test of resilience we know. **If your building disappeared tonight, could your team work tomorrow morning?** If the answer is yes, congratulations, your business lives in the cloud and your momentum is protected. If the answer is no, the rest of this book is your roadmap. Chapter 2 starts exactly there.

CHAPTER 02

RESILIENT · THE RISE SERIES

02

Work From Anywhere.

The office became a thing you do, not a place you go. Cloud computing, virtual desktops, and modern apps make location irrelevant, and that changes everything.

Your business should follow your people, not the other way around.

For decades, work meant driving to where the files were. The server sat in a closet, the software sat on the desktop, and if you were not in the building, you were not working. The cloud flipped that model. Now the files, apps, and even entire desktops live in secure data centers, and **work happens wherever your people are**, at home, on site with a client, or in seat 14C.

	The old way	The anywhere way
Where work lives	A server in the closet, files trapped in the office	Secure cloud, available from any location
Devices	The one desktop at the one desk	Any device, laptop, tablet, or phone, same experience
A snow day	A lost day of production	A normal day, just with better coffee
Scaling up	Buy hardware, wait weeks, hope you sized it right	Add users in minutes, pay only for what you use
Hiring	Limited to a commute radius	The best person for the job, wherever they live
Cost model	Big capital purchases every few years	Predictable monthly investment, no surprise refreshes

90%+

of organizations now run workloads in the cloud

Flexera State of the Cloud

53%

of remote capable US employees now work hybrid

Gallup 2025

98%

of workers want the option to work remotely at least part time

Buffer State of Remote Work

Sources: Flexera State of the Cloud Report, Gallup hybrid work indicator 2025, Buffer State of Remote Work.

CHAPTER 2 · THE ANYWHERE STACK

Five layers that set your business free.

Anywhere operations is not one product, it is a stack. Each layer removes one more reason your business needs a specific room to function. Together they add up to something simple and powerful, **a company that works the same everywhere**.

Identity, the new front door

One secure login follows each person everywhere. Multi factor authentication proves who they are, so access depends on identity, not on which building they sit in.

Modern apps in the cloud

Email, documents, line of business tools, all delivered as services. Always updated, always available, no server closet required.

Virtual desktops

A full company desktop streamed securely to any screen. Close the laptop at the office, open a tablet at home, everything is exactly where you left it.

Data that lives everywhere and nowhere

Files sit in secure, replicated cloud storage with version history. No single disk, office, or city holds your business hostage.

Device freedom

Company laptop, home desktop, or a phone in the field. Managed policies keep every device safe while people work the way that suits them.

The payoff is felt on day one

Teams stop planning around the office and start planning around the work. Client questions get answered from anywhere. And when the unexpected arrives, and it will, **the business simply keeps going**. Next question, what happens when something actually breaks? That is Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 03

RESILIENT · THE RISE SERIES

03

Always On.

Prevention is a plan. Recovery is a guarantee. Backup, disaster recovery, and redundancy decide whether a bad day is a footnote or a funeral.

Every recovery plan comes down to two numbers.

Ask any continuity expert about your backups and they will ask two questions back. How much work can you afford to lose, and how long can you afford to be dark? Those answers are your **RPO** and **RTO**, and every dollar you invest in resilience is really buying those two numbers down.

Recovery, on one timeline

ILLUSTRATIVE



REDUNDANCY, LAYER BY LAYER

Data redundancy

The 3, 2, 1 rule never goes out of style. Three copies of your data, on two different types of media, with one copy off site. Cloud replication makes this automatic.

Hardware redundancy

No single server, drive, or switch should be able to stop the company. Failover systems pick up the load before most people notice anything happened.

Connectivity redundancy

A second internet path, plus cellular failover, keeps phones ringing and cloud apps reachable even when a backhoe finds the fiber line.

People redundancy

Documented processes and cross trained teams mean no critical task lives in one person's head. Vacations stop being a risk category.

A plan you have not tested is a theory.

Backups fail silently all the time, a full disk, a changed password, a job that quietly stopped running months ago. The only backup you can trust is one you have restored, on purpose, recently. Continuity is a loop you run, not a binder on a shelf.

The continuity loop



The cost curve of waiting

ILLUSTRATIVE



97%

of organizations with solid, tested backups got their encrypted data back after ransomware

Sophos, industry reporting

24 days

average downtime after a ransomware attack without a recovery plan

Statista, Coveware

Sources: Sophos State of Ransomware, Statista and Coveware ransomware downtime research.

CHAPTER 04

RESILIENT · THE RISE SERIES

04

Connected Everywhere.

A resilient business is a connected one. Unified communications turn calls, chat, video, and files into one conversation that follows your people anywhere.

Communication is infrastructure. Treat it that way.

When teams scattered in 2020, the companies that stayed sharp were the ones whose communication moved with them. Unified communications puts **voice, video, chat, and files in one platform**, on every device, so a conversation started at a desk finishes in a car without missing a word. The alternative is app sprawl, and app sprawl is quietly expensive.

1,200

times per day the average worker toggles between apps and websites

Harvard Business Review

4 hrs

per week lost just reorienting after switching tools

Harvard Business Review

1

platform where a resilient business talks, meets, shares, and decides

The whole point

The moment	Scattered tools	Unified communications
A client calls	Rings one desk phone in an empty office	Rings the person, desk, laptop, and mobile at once
A quick question	Email thread, twelve replies, two days	A chat message, answered in ninety seconds
A team decision	Waiting for the next scheduled meeting	Instant huddle with screen share, decided today
A shared file	Five versions named final, final2, FINAL	One live document everyone edits together
A snowstorm	Missed calls and voicemail roulette	Business as usual, clients never know the difference

Collaboration compounds

Faster answers become faster projects. Faster projects become happier clients. Communication is not a soft benefit, **it is the connective tissue of momentum**, and in a resilient business it never depends on a building.

Sources: Harvard Business Review research on digital context switching, 2022.

CHAPTER 05

RESILIENT · THE RISE SERIES

05

Resilient By Design.

Your business no longer lives inside four walls, so its protection cannot either. Identity, smart access, and device trust guard a company that works everywhere.

The perimeter did not disappear. It moved to your people.

In the office era, security was a wall around a building. In the anywhere era, your team logs in from kitchens, airports, and coffee shops, on laptops, tablets, and phones. Freedom without guardrails is just risk, so a resilient business builds **security as a framework** around every login, everywhere.

Identity comes first

Multi factor authentication on every account is the single cheapest defense there is, blocking the vast majority of account takeover attempts before they start.

Geofencing and smart access

Conditional rules check where a login comes from and how risky it looks. A sign in from your sales rep in Minneapolis sails through. The same account from another continent gets stopped and challenged.

Bring your own device, safely

People will use personal devices, so plan for it. Device management keeps company data in an encrypted, removable container, work stays protected, personal photos stay personal.

Public Wi-Fi without the worry

Encrypted connections and secure tunnels mean the airport network never sees your data. Convenience and safety stop being a trade you have to make.

90%+

of account attacks are blocked by multi factor authentication alone

Microsoft security research

60%

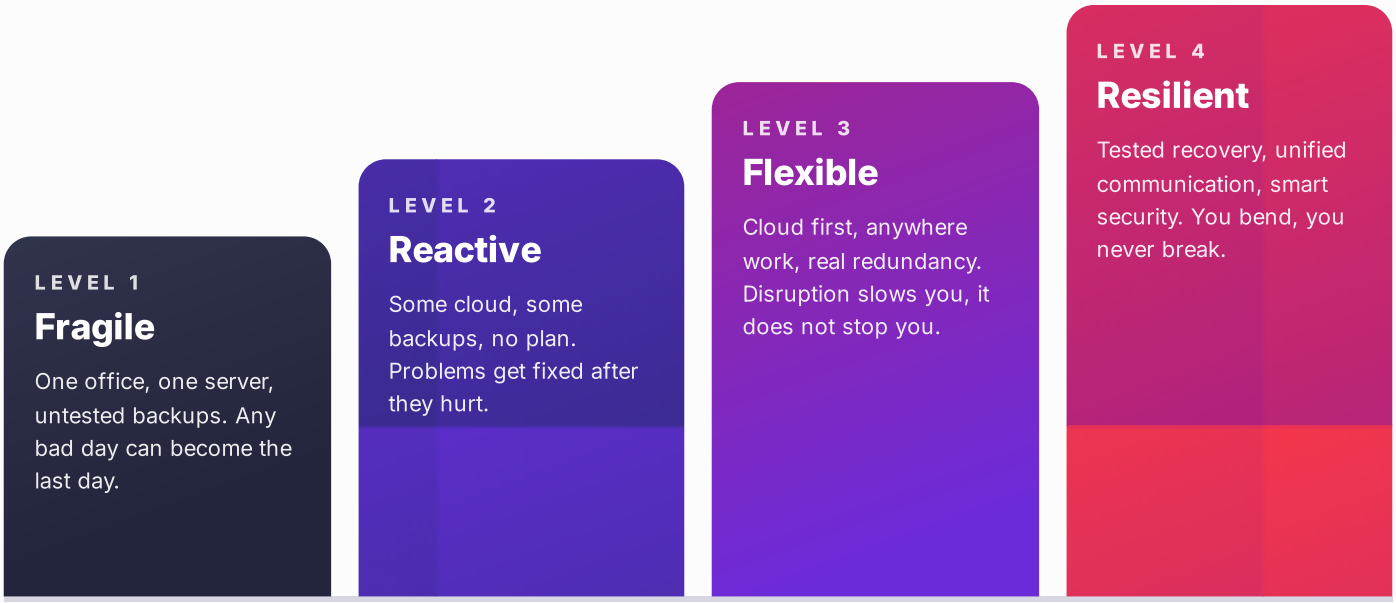
of breaches involve a human action, which smart access rules help catch

Verizon DBIR 2025

Sources: Microsoft security research on multi factor authentication, Verizon Data Breach Investigations Report 2025.

The resilience maturity ladder.

Most businesses sit on the second rung and do not know it. They own tools, so they feel covered. But owning a generator is not the same as knowing it starts. The goal is the top rung, where a disruption is a manageable event, not an existential one.



MOST BUSINESSES ARE HERE ↑ LEVEL 2, AND THE CLIMB IS FASTER THAN THEY THINK

How Solution Builders moves you up the ladder

We start with an honest assessment of where you stand, then design the climb, cloud where it counts, redundancy where it matters, communication that follows your people, and recovery that has actually been rehearsed. **Modern, flexible, and built around your workflow**, not the other way around.

THE PAYOFF

Resilient is not the goal. It is what protects the goal.

A resilient foundation makes your business flexible, a flexible business earns trust from clients and talent alike, and a trusted business is free to do the one thing that matters most, keep building momentum.



YOUR RESILIENT FRAMEWORK, ON ONE CHECKLIST

- **Cloud first operations**
  Apps, files, and desktops available from any location, on any device
- **Tested 3, 2, 1 backups**
  Restores proven, not assumed, with a copy safely off site
- **Redundancy at every layer**
  Data, hardware, connectivity, and people, no single point of failure
- **A written continuity plan**
  RTO and RPO defined, roles assigned, rehearsed before the bad day
- **Unified communications**
  Voice, video, chat, and files in one platform that follows your team
- **Identity based security**
  Multi factor authentication and smart access rules on every account
- **Managed device freedom**
  Company and personal devices protected without slowing anyone down
- **A partner who has done this**
  Design, migration, testing, and 24/7 support from one team

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

RISE · R is for Resilient

Your resilient business starts with one conversation.

Solution Builders designs resilience from the ground up, cloud, backup and disaster recovery, unified communications, and anywhere security, all working as one framework. Let us show you where you stand on the maturity ladder, and exactly how to make your momentum unbreakable.

TALK TO A RESILIENCE ARCHITECT

www.solutionbuilders.com

BOOK A FREE DISCOVERY SESSION

No pressure, just a plan

RESILIENT · INTEGRATED · SECURE · EVOLVING

Figures cited from FEMA small business disaster statistics, Ponemon Institute downtime research, Gallup, Buffer, Flexera, Harvard Business Review, Sophos, Statista, Microsoft security research, and the Verizon Data Breach Investigations Report 2025. Charts marked illustrative are for explanation, not forecasts.

RISE · I is for Integrated

Built Integrated.

One designed environment that turns a pile of tools into a seamless orchestra, feeding one source of truth.

R **Resilient** Cloud, continuity, backup	**I** **Integrated** Infrastructure, services	S **Secure** Cybersecurity	E **Evolving** AI

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

BOOK TWO
THE RISE SERIES

RISE · I is for Integrated

BUILT

Why connected technology is the engine of the modern business, and how one designed environment turns a pile of tools into a seamless orchestra.

R RESILIENT
I INTEGRATED
S SECURE
E EVOLVING

RISE

· I IS FOR INTEGRATED

Integration is not plumbing. It is how a business moves as one.

Picture a hundred brilliant musicians, each playing a different song. That is the modern business technology stack. Old equipment next to new, servers next to SaaS, apps the staff downloaded that leadership has never heard of, and three different tools quietly doing the same job. Every piece works. Almost nothing works **together**.

Here is the part most people miss. The businesses pulling ahead right now are rarely the ones with the most technology. They are the ones whose technology, data, and applications are **integrated on purpose**, designed around the way the business actually wants to work, protected at every connection, and feeding one source of truth. That is exactly what the I in RISE stands for, and it is the difference between owning instruments and hearing music.

R	I	S	E
Resilient	**Integrated**	**Secure**	**Evolving**
Cloud, continuity, backup	Integrations, infrastructure, services	Cybersecurity	AI

WHAT YOU WILL TAKE AWAY FROM THIS BOOK

Four chapters, one promise. By the last page you will understand how your technology environment became a patchwork, why the fix starts with your ideal workflow instead of another purchase, how data bridges turn scattered platforms into one source of truth, and what an intelligently integrated business actually feels like to run. Practical, visual, and built to be read, not skimmed.

INSIDE THIS BOOK

Four chapters, one connected business.

01 Killing Frankenstein

How thirty years of piecemeal upgrades stitched a monster together, from the first beige box network to a stack of apps nobody mapped, and why you cannot patch a design problem.

THE MONSTER TIMELINE · SHADOW IT · ANATOMY OF THE PATCHWORK

02 The Workflow Comes First

Flip the order. Start with the way the business wants to work, then design the technology environment around it, protected at every connection and built for the outcomes you actually want.

DESIGNING BACKWARDS · OLD WAY VS NEW WAY · ONE SEAMLESS ORCHESTRA

03 Data Bridges

Your most valuable data is stranded across a dozen platforms. Bridge every one of them into your main line of business system, one source of truth, and watch decisions get easier.

ONE SOURCE OF TRUTH · HUB AND SPOKE · FROM DATA TO DECISIONS

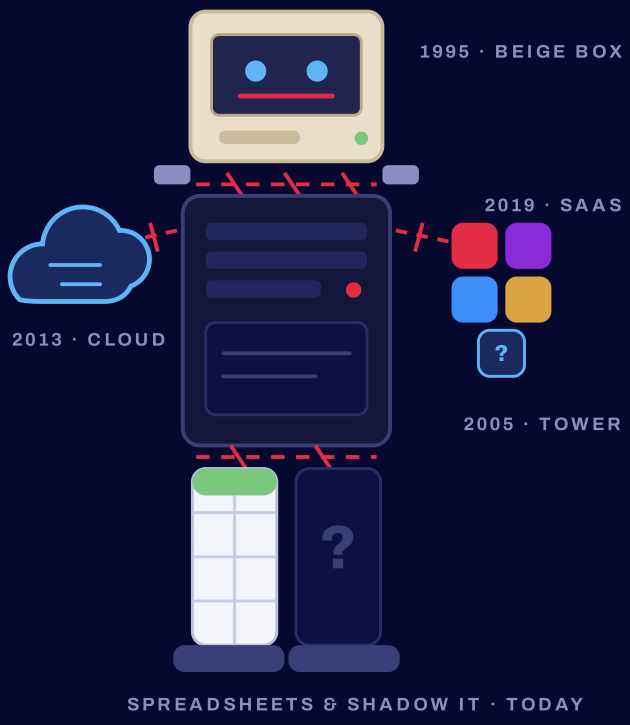
04 The Integrated Enterprise

The whole story in one place. The integration maturity ladder, the dividend a connected environment pays every single day, and exactly how your first ninety days should look.

THE MATURITY LADDER · THE INTEGRATION DIVIDEND · YOUR FIRST 90 DAYS

Read it straight through, or jump to the chapter that hurts.

Retyping data all day? Start with Chapter 3. Every new tool made things messier? Chapter 2. Want the origin story? Chapter 1. Every road leads to Chapter 4.



Killing Frankenstein.

Nobody set out to build a monster. It was assembled one sensible upgrade at a time, over thirty years, until the business was running on a creature nobody fully understands. This is how it happened, and why it matters now.

THE MONSTER, ASSEMBLED

130+

SaaS applications running inside the average company, most of them never mapped

BETTERCLOUD

28%

of business applications are actually integrated with each other. The rest work alone

MULESOFT CONNECTIVITY BENCHMARK

30 to 40%

of technology spending now happens outside the IT department, in the shadows

GARTNER

How the monster was made.

Rewind to the late nineties. A business owner hires a tech person to come in and install the company's very first network. A server in a closet, a row of beige machines, a printer everyone fights over. It feels like the future, and in a way it is.

Here is the detail everyone forgets. Technology back then was **very limited**. There were only so many things it could do. So the owner did the smart thing, the only thing, and **designed the company's processes around those limitations**. Orders got printed because the system could not send them. Data got rekeyed because the systems could not talk. Approvals moved on paper because there was nowhere else for them to go.

The limitations quietly became the process. The process quietly became the culture.

Then technology started improving, fast. And the business kept up the only way a busy business can, **piecemeal**. A new server here. Beige boxes swapped for black towers there. Email moved to the cloud one year, files half moved a few years later. Each team downloaded its own favorite apps. Every change was reasonable on its own, and every change stitched one more limb onto the creature.

Thirty years later the average company runs old equipment beside new, multiple applications doing the same job, and data scattered across dozens of SaaS platforms and web tools. Very little of it is integrated in any intelligent way. It all technically works. It just does not work **together**.

> **The processes were designed around the limits of 1998 technology. The limits are long gone. The processes remain.**
>
> THE FRANKENSTEIN PROBLEM, IN ONE SENTENCE

3×

Companies routinely pay for two or three tools that do the same job, because each one arrived solving a moment, not a strategy

SAAS PORTFOLIO AUDITS, ZYLO

53%

of paid SaaS licenses go unused in a typical month. The monster eats budget even while it sleeps

ZYLO SAAS MANAGEMENT INDEX

20 to 40%

of the value of a typical technology estate is technical debt, the accumulated cost of piecemeal decisions

MCKINSEY

Nobody is to blame. Everybody is paying for it.

Every stitch on Frankenstein was a rational decision made by a smart person solving that day's problem. That is exactly why the monster is so hard to see from the inside. It does not look like a monster. It looks like Tuesday.

Thirty years of stitches: a timeline.

Five eras, five layers of technology, one creature. Almost every established business will recognize itself somewhere on this spine.

1995

The Beige Era

LAYER 01

The first server, the first network, the first login. Technology can only do a few things, so the owner designs every process around what it **cannot** do. Those workarounds become the official way of working.

2005

The Black Tower Era

LAYER 02

Beige boxes become black towers. The server closet grows into a rack. Software gets installed machine by machine, license by license. New hardware, same old processes, first real maintenance burden.

2013

Half in the Cloud

LAYER 03

Email moves to the cloud. Some files follow, some stay on the server, and suddenly there are two of everything. The business now lives in two worlds at once, and the stitching between them is manual.

2019

The SaaS Explosion

LAYER 04

Every team swipes a card and downloads its own solution. Sales, marketing, finance, and operations each build a private stack. Critical data starts living in apps the organization is not even aware of.

2026

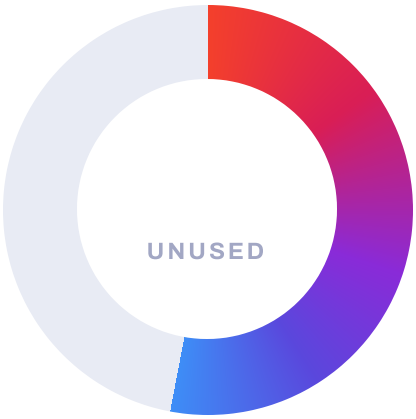
The Stitched Monster

TODAY

Old and new, side by side, held together by habits, exports, and hope. It all works. None of it works together. The good news: for the first time ever, the technology exists to design your way out.

Anatomy of the patchwork.

WHERE THE SOFTWARE BUDGET GOES



- **Licenses paid for, never used**
- Licenses in active use

In a typical month, more than half of paid SaaS seats sit idle. Multiply that across 130 apps and the monster's grocery bill comes into focus.

ZYLO SAAS MANAGEMENT INDEX

1,200

times per day the average worker toggles between apps and websites just to do one job

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

4 HRS/WK

lost per person simply reorienting after switching tools, roughly nine percent of the working year

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

You might be running a monster if...

- ✓ Someone on your team **retypes data** from one system into another every single week
- ✓ Two departments pay for **different tools that do the same thing**, and neither knows it
- ✓ Exactly **one person** knows how the invoicing spreadsheet actually connects to anything
- ✓ Monthly reports are **assembled by hand** from exports out of four different platforms
- ✓ Nobody in the building can produce a **complete list of every app** the company runs on

Every unmapped app is a door. Every manual handoff is a crack. The monster is not just expensive, it is exposed.

WHERE INTEGRATED MEETS SECURE

You cannot patch a design problem.

Frankenstein does not need another upgrade bolted on. He needs a blueprint. The next chapter is about drawing one, starting not with technology, but with the way your business actually wants to work.

The workflow comes first.

For thirty years, businesses shaped their processes around what technology could not do. That era is over. Today a great provider starts with your ideal workflow, your desired business outcomes, and designs the entire environment backwards from there.

40%+

of workers spend at least a quarter of their week on manual, repetitive tasks a designed environment would erase

SMARTSHEET

70%

of technology transformations fall short, usually because tools were bought before workflows were designed

MCKINSEY

1st

question that matters: not what should we buy, but how do we want to work

THE WORKFLOW FIRST PRINCIPLE

Design backwards from the outcome.

Here is the flip. Instead of asking what technology can do and bending the business around the answer, a modern MSP sits down with the owner and asks a better question: **in a perfect world, how would work flow through this company?** Then the technology environment gets designed around that answer, so it supports the desired workflow and reaches the desired business outcomes faster and more cost effectively.

	THE OLD WAY · TECHNOLOGY FIRST	THE NEW WAY · WORKFLOW FIRST
Starting point	Whatever the last tech person installed	The owner's ideal, desired workflow state
The question asked	"What can this system do?"	"How do we want work to move?"
How tools get chosen	One at a time, as pain shows up, by whoever feels it	As one designed environment, each piece chosen for how it connects
How processes form	Around the limitations of the tools	Around the outcomes of the business
The result	Frankenstein: it works, but nothing works together	An orchestra: every piece supporting the same performance

THE WORKFLOW FIRST DESIGN LOOP

01
Map the ideal workflow
Sit with leadership and chart how work **should** move, order to cash, lead to client, ticket to resolution.

›

02
Audit everything you run
Every app, every server, every subscription, every shadow tool, on one map for the first time ever.

›

03
Design the environment
Keep what serves the workflow, retire what does not, and choose every new piece for how it connects.

›

04
Integrate, secure, support
Bridge the data, protect every connection, and keep the whole environment managed as one.

Notice what step four is not. It is not the end. The loop keeps turning, because the business keeps evolving, and the environment is now designed to evolve with it instead of against it.

One seamless orchestra.

A hundred instruments do not make an orchestra. A conductor does. When the environment is designed as one, three things happen at once: **all your applications work together** instead of side by side, **all your data points talk to each other** instead of hiding in silos, and **the network stays protected** while it happens, because every connection was built with security in the blueprint, not bolted on after.

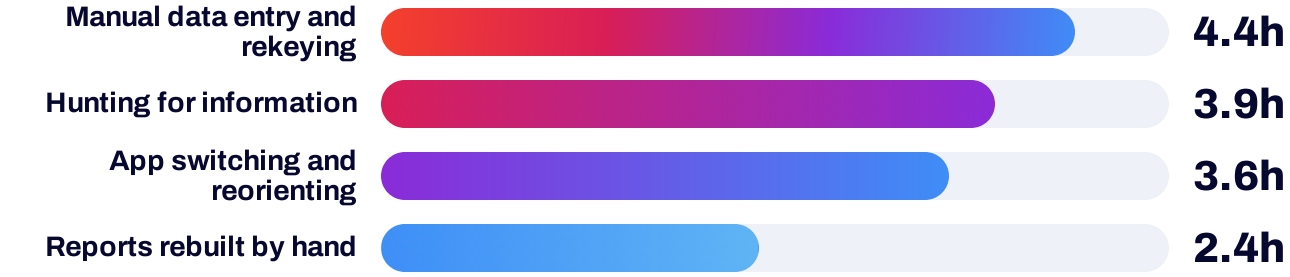
That last part deserves its own sentence. New technology and new integrations mean new doorways, and a doorway is only an asset if you control the lock. Workflow first design treats every bridge between systems as something to **secure on day one**, which is exactly where the I in RISE shakes hands with the S.

This is also where a managed service provider earns the word **partner**. An MSP that lives in this work brings the assessment, the roadmap, the professional services to build the bridges, and the ongoing management to keep the whole orchestra in tune, so the owner gets to think about the business instead of the wiring.

> **You stop buying instruments and start hearing music. That is the whole difference.**
>
> WORKFLOW FIRST, IN ONE LINE

WHERE THE HOURS COME BACK · TYPICAL WEEK, PER EMPLOYEE

ILLUSTRATIVE, BASED ON PUBLISHED TASK RESEARCH



Every one of these hours is a stitch on the monster. In a workflow first environment they are handled by the bridges between systems, which means **fourteen plus hours a week, per person**, walk back through the door.

Designed, integrated, protected, supported.

That is the full sentence. An environment designed around your workflow, integrated so every system talks, protected at every connection, and supported by one accountable partner. Next up: the bridges the data travels on.

Data bridges.

Your most valuable asset is scattered across a dozen platforms, and most of it never gets used. Data bridges link every one of those platforms into your main line of business system, one source of truth, where amazing things start to happen.

68%

of the data available to businesses never gets analyzed or used at all

SEAGATE · IDC RETHINK DATA

$12.9M

average yearly cost of poor data quality per organization, silos are a leading cause

GARTNER

30%

of the workday spent just hunting for information that already exists somewhere

IDC

One source of truth.

Right now, critical data is roaming around your business in specific applications where nobody can find it or use it when it matters. Customer history in one platform, invoices in another, support tickets in a third, project notes in a fourth, and the glue between them is somebody's memory.

A data bridge fixes that by linking each platform into your **main line of business application**, whether that is a CRM, an ERP, or whatever system your company treats as home base. Every tool keeps doing its job. The difference is that its data now flows home, so the whole business reads from **one source of truth**.

THE HUB AND SPOKE MODEL · EVERY PLATFORM BRIDGED HOME — ILLUSTRATIVE



Each gradient line is a bridge: a secured, automated connection that moves data home in both directions. No exports, no rekeying, no waiting on the one person who knows where the file lives.

0

exports, imports, or copy paste handoffs once a bridge is live. The data simply arrives

THE POINT OF A BRIDGE

2 WAY

flow. The hub learns from every spoke, and every spoke reads back the same clean truth

BIDIRECTIONAL SYNC

1

place to look for the answer, for everyone, from the front desk to the boardroom

ONE SOURCE OF TRUTH

From data to decisions.

Bridged data is not just tidier. It is the raw material for **business intelligence**. When all the data points talk to each other, BI dashboards stop being art projects and start answering real questions: which service line actually makes money, which customers are about to leave, which job types blow their estimates. Leaders stop making decisions on gut feel and start making them on evidence.

23×

more likely to acquire customers. Companies with a real data culture simply see opportunities first

MCKINSEY

19×

more likely to be profitable, because pricing, staffing, and spending run on evidence

MCKINSEY

6×

more likely to retain the customers they already have, the cheapest revenue there is

MCKINSEY

	STRANDED DATA	BRIDGED DATA
Where answers live	In seven apps and three people's heads	In one system everyone can see
Monthly reporting	Days of exports, formulas, and hope	A live dashboard, always current
The customer view	Fragments: a ticket here, an invoice there	One record showing the whole relationship
Forecasting	Last year plus a guess	Trends drawn from every data point you own
When someone leaves	Their knowledge walks out the door	The truth stays in the system
AI readiness	Nothing to feed it but fragments	Clean, connected fuel, ready for the E in RISE

When the data starts talking to itself, leaders stop guessing.

THE BI DIVIDEND

Bridges are built secure, or not at all.

Every bridge moves your most sensitive asset, so every bridge gets encryption, access controls, and monitoring from day one. Connected does not have to mean exposed. Designed right, it means the opposite.

The integrated enterprise.

The whole story, told once, start to finish. Where the monster came from, what replaces it, how to know where you stand today, and what the first ninety days of the climb actually look like.

One.

environment, designed on purpose, feeding one source of truth for the whole company

THE DESTINATION

4

stages on the integration maturity ladder, from Stitched all the way up to Orchestrated

THE MAP

90

days from first conversation to a working blueprint and the first bridges going live

THE FIRST CLIMB

From Frankenstein to orchestra, in five beats.

1
A business builds its processes around the **limits of old technology**, then upgrades piecemeal for thirty years.

2
The result is **Frankenstein**: 130 plus apps, duplicate tools, shadow IT, and data stranded everywhere.

3
The fix flips the order: map the **ideal workflow** first, then design the environment around it.

4
Data bridges link every platform into one source of truth, securely, and BI turns it into decisions.

5
The business runs as **one orchestra**, reaching its outcomes faster and more cost effectively.

THE INTEGRATION MATURITY LADDER · WHERE DOES YOUR BUSINESS STAND?

STAGE	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	HOW DATA MOVES	WHAT LEADERSHIP FEELS
1 · Stitched	Tools bought one crisis at a time, nobody owns the full list	Exports, rekeying, and memory	"Why does everything take so long?"
2 · Connected	A few point to point links between favorite apps	Some sync, plenty of gaps and breakage	"Better, but I still cannot get a straight answer"
3 · Integrated	Environment designed around the workflow, bridges into one hub	Automatically, both directions, secured	"I can finally see the whole business"
4 · Orchestrated	One managed environment, BI on top, automation throughout	As one living system, feeding dashboards and AI	"We decide in hours, not weeks"

Two honest notes about the ladder. First, almost every established business sits at stage one or two, so there is no shame in the diagnosis, only in ignoring it. Second, you do not climb it by buying more software. You climb it with a **blueprint**, and a partner who has drawn hundreds of them.

> **The ladder is not about technology maturity. It is about how fast your business can make a good decision.**
>
> WHY THIS LADDER MATTERS

The integration dividend.

An integrated environment is not a project you finish. It is a dividend the business collects every single day, in six currencies at once.

SPEED
Work flows straight through instead of waiting at every handoff.

COST
Duplicate tools retired, idle licenses gone, hours returned to real work.

SECURITY
Fewer unknown apps, every connection locked and watched.

INSIGHT
One source of truth feeding dashboards leaders actually use.

EXPERIENCE
Staff stop fighting tools. Customers feel one company, not five departments.

SCALE
Growth means adding to the design, not adding to the pile.

YOUR FIRST 90 DAYS · HOW THE CLIMB ACTUALLY STARTS

DAYS 1 TO 30
Discover
Inventory every app, server, and subscription, including the shadows. Sit with leadership and map the ideal workflow. Name the source of truth.

DAYS 31 TO 60
Design
Draw the blueprint. Decide what stays, what goes, and what gets replaced. Plan every bridge, with security requirements written into each one.

DAYS 61 TO 90
Deliver
Build the first bridges, retire the first duplicates, stand up the first dashboard, and train the team. Momentum takes over from there.

And here is the door to the next book.

An integrated business is an AI ready business. Clean, connected data is the fuel every intelligent tool runs on, which is exactly where the E in RISE picks up the story. But first, the bottom line.

THE PAYOFF

Integrated is not the goal. It is what makes everything else possible.

An integrated environment makes the business efficient, an efficient business generates clean and connected data, and clean data makes every decision, every dashboard, and every future AI tool smarter. That chain is the whole point of the I in RISE.

Integrated ONE ENVIRONMENT › **Efficient** HOURS RETURNED › **Insightful** ONE TRUTH, REAL BI › **Momentum** OUTCOMES, FASTER

YOUR INTEGRATION BLUEPRINT, ON ONE CHECKLIST

- **A complete app inventory** — Every tool on one map, shadows included
- **Workflows designed on purpose** — Built around outcomes, not old limitations
- **One named source of truth** — CRM, ERP, or your core platform, chosen on purpose
- **Every integration secured** — Encryption, access control, and monitoring on every bridge
- **Duplicate tools retired** — One job, one tool, budget back in your pocket
- **Dashboards leaders actually use** — BI answering real questions in real numbers
- **Data bridges into the core** — Every platform flowing home, both directions
- **One accountable partner** — Design, bridges, security, and support under one roof

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

· I IS FOR INTEGRATED

Your integrated environment starts with one conversation.

Solution Builders designs technology environments around the way your business actually wants to work, the workflow, the bridges, the source of truth, and the security woven through all of it, managed as one. Let us show you where you sit on the maturity ladder, and exactly what your first ninety days would look like.

TALK TO A SOLUTIONS ARCHITECT

www.solutionbuilders.com

BOOK A FREE DISCOVERY SESSION

No pressure, just a blueprint

RESILIENT · INTEGRATED · SECURE · EVOLVING

RISE

Figures cited from the MuleSoft Connectivity Benchmark, Zylo SaaS Management Index, BetterCloud State of SaaS, Harvard Business Review task switching research, Gartner and IDC data and shadow IT research, McKinsey technical debt and data culture research, Smartsheet automation research, and the Seagate and IDC Rethink Data study. Charts marked illustrative are for explanation, not forecasts. Solution Builders is a 2026 MSP501 Top Managed Service Provider.

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

PART THREE

THE RISE SERIES · COMPLETE EDITION

RISE · S is for Secure

Built Secure.

The foundation every modern business stands on, a layered framework that keeps momentum unbreakable.

R	I	**S**	E
Resilient	**Integrated**	**Secure**	**Evolving**
Cloud, continuity, backup	Infrastructure, services	Cybersecurity	AI

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

BOOK THREE
THE RISE SERIES

• RISE · S is for Secure

BUILT

Secure.

Why cybersecurity is the foundation every modern business stands on, and how a full framework keeps your momentum unbreakable.



R	I	S	E
Resilient	Integrated	Secure	Evolving

RISE · S is for Secure

Security is not a feature you bolt on later. It is the floor everything stands on.

Picture your business like a team on a winning streak. Every project shipped, every client won, every quarter beaten, that is momentum, and momentum is the most valuable thing you have. Now picture the one hit that ends a season in a single afternoon. In sport it is an injury. In business it is a breach. It freezes operations, drains cash, shatters trust, and in the worst cases it closes the doors for good.

Here is the part most people miss. The companies that get hit hardest are rarely the ones with the weakest tools. They are the ones who treated security as a project with an end date, a thing you buy once and forget. Real security is not a product. It is a **framework**, built into the foundation and woven through everything above it. That is exactly what the **S in RISE** stands for, and it is why we put it at the center.

R	I	S	E
Resilient	**Integrated**	**Secure**	**Evolving**
Cloud, continuity, backup	Infrastructure, services	Cybersecurity	AI

What you will take away from this book

Four chapters, one promise. By the last page you will understand why a secure foundation comes first, how a layered framework actually works, why testing your defenses matters as much as building them, and how your own people become your strongest wall. **Practical, visual, and built to be read, not skimmed.**

INSIDE THIS BOOK

Four chapters, one secure foundation.

01 The Foundation

Why a breach is the one thing that stops momentum cold, what it really costs, and how an attack actually unfolds.

- The momentum curve
- The true cost of a breach
- Anatomy of an attack

02 Harden Every Layer

Defense in depth, from endpoints to identity. The difference between legacy antivirus, EDR, and a managed team that never sleeps.

- Defense in depth
- Antivirus vs EDR vs MDR
- Backup and recovery
- A $100M lesson from Pixar

03 Test It Before They Do

Pen testing and breach simulation. Finding the cracks on your terms, and the maturity ladder that shows where you stand.

- The testing loop
- Scan vs test vs simulate
- The maturity ladder

04 Your People Are The Perimeter

The human firewall. Why most breaches are invited in, and how training flips your team from weakest link to strongest defense.

- The human element
- Social engineering decoded
- Building the human firewall

CHAPTER 01
SECURE · THE RISE SERIES

01

The Foundation.

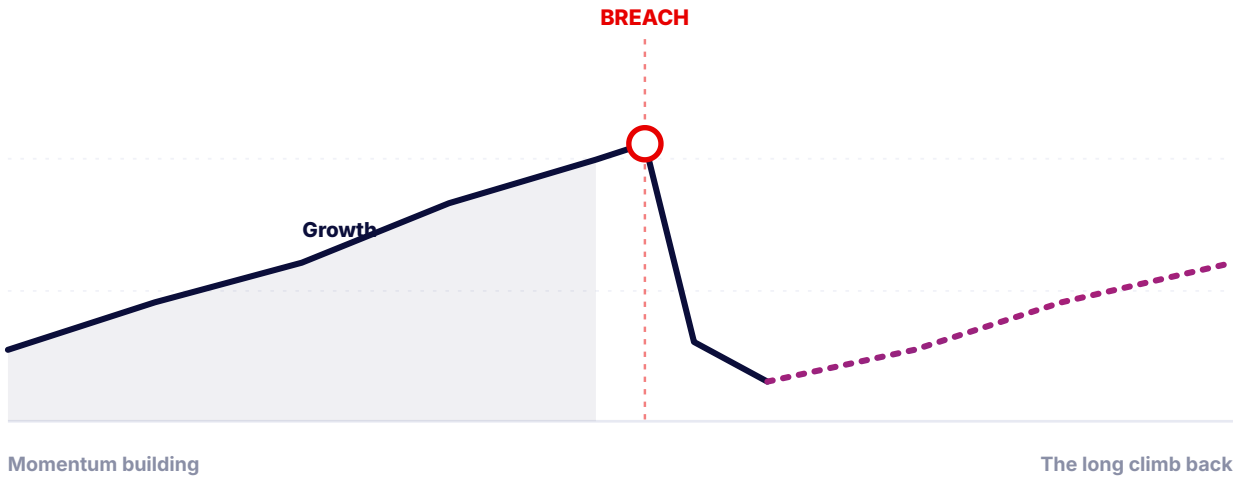
One breach can do what no competitor ever could, stop your business in its tracks. Before you build anything, you build the thing that keeps it all standing.

A breach does not just cost money. It costs your momentum.

Growth compounds. So does damage. A single incident can erase months of progress in an afternoon, and the climb back is always slower than the fall. Worse, the costs you can see, the ransom, the recovery, are only the surface. Underneath sit the quiet killers, lost customers, a damaged reputation, and a team pulled off the work that drives the business forward.

The momentum curve

ILLUSTRATIVE



$4.44M

Global average cost of a single data breach

IBM Cost of a Data Breach 2025

241

Average days just to identify and contain a breach

IBM 2025

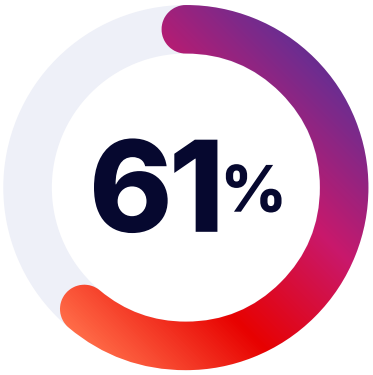
$3.31M

Average breach cost for companies under 500 staff

IBM 2025

Smaller does not mean safer. It often means targeted.

Attackers go where the doors are easiest to open. Growing companies hold valuable data but rarely have a full time security team watching it, and that gap is exactly what gets exploited.



of small and midsize businesses reported a breach in the past year

PreVeil, 2025

43% of all cyberattacks aim squarely at small businesses

40% say a single six figure attack could end the business for good

88% of SMB breaches involved ransomware, versus 39% at large firms

PREVENTION VERSUS RECOVERY, SIDE BY SIDE

Investment	Cost to prevent	Cost to recover	What you actually get
Security awareness training	A few dollars per user, monthly	Tens of thousands per incident	Stops the click before it happens
Managed detection and response	A predictable monthly fee	$4.44M average breach	Catches intruders in minutes, not months
Backup and disaster recovery	A fraction of one server	Days of downtime, lost data	You restore and keep moving
Doing nothing	$0 today	The whole business, potentially	Hope is not a strategy

A breach is rarely a kicked in door. It is a slow, quiet walk inside.

Hollywood made hacking look like furious typing and a sudden ACCESS GRANTED. Reality is patient and far more ordinary. Most attacks follow the same five stages, and every stage is a chance to stop them, if you are watching.

1. **The lure**
   A convincing email, text, or fake login page lands in an inbox. It looks routine, an invoice, a password reset, a note from the boss.
2. **The click**
   Someone clicks. Credentials are handed over, or a hidden payload quietly installs. The attacker is now inside, often without a single alarm.
3. **The wait**
   This is the dangerous part. Intruders sit quietly, sometimes for weeks, mapping your network and finding the data worth stealing.
4. **The move**
   They escalate access, reach the crown jewels, and disable your backups so you cannot simply restore your way out.
5. **The hit**
   Data is stolen, systems are locked, and a ransom demand appears. By now the damage is done and the clock is loud.

Why this matters

Notice how many steps happen **before** the ransom note. Every one of them is a layer where a strong framework can catch the intruder. One wall might fail. Five rarely do. **That is the entire case for defense in depth,** which is exactly where Chapter 2 goes next.

The number that hurts

The average intruder goes undetected for a long stretch before acting. The faster you see them, the smaller the damage. Detection speed is not a luxury, it is the whole game.



CHAPTER 02

SECURE · THE RISE SERIES

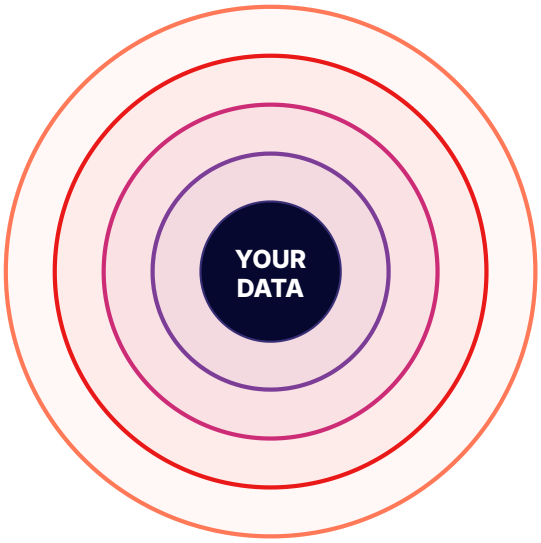
02

Harden Every Layer.

Real security is not one wall. It is many, each one buying you time and catching what the last one missed. Endpoints, detection, response, recovery, defense built in depth.

No single tool saves you. Layers do.

Picture your business as a fortress with rings of protection around what matters most. An attacker has to beat every ring. You only have to make any one of them hold.



- **Testing & hardening**
  Find weak points before attackers do
- **People & awareness**
  A trained team that does not take the bait
- **Network & identity**
  MFA, least privilege, segmented access
- **Endpoints EDR / MDR**
  Devices watched and defended 24/7
- **Data & backups**
  The crown jewels, encrypted and recoverable

ENDPOINT PROTECTION HAS COME A LONG WAY

Capability	Legacy antivirus	EDR	MDR (managed)
Blocks known viruses	✓	✓	✓
Detects new, unknown threats	×	✓	✓
Sees behavior across all devices	×	✓	✓
Human experts hunting 24/7	×	×	✓
Responds and contains for you	×	Some	✓
Shrinks attacker dwell time	×	Some	✓

When prevention fails, recovery is everything.

Even the best defended business should plan to be hit. The difference between a bad week and a closed business is simple, can you restore clean data fast? That is the entire job of backup and disaster recovery, and the rule that governs it has not changed in decades because it works.

THE 3, 2, 1 RULE, SIMPLE AND UNBREAKABLE

3 **COPIES**
of your data

2 **DIFFERENT**
media types

1 **COPY**
stored off site

97%

of organizations with solid backups recovered their encrypted data, and 53% were back within a week

Sophos / industry reporting, 2025

$1.9M

average saved per breach by teams using AI and automation in defense

IBM 2025

The catch nobody talks about

Having a backup is not the same as having a backup that **works**. Backups fail silently all the time, a full disk, a misconfiguration, a job that quietly stopped running months ago. The only backup you can trust is one you have **tested by actually restoring it.** The next page is a true story about exactly why that matters.

How a backup at someone's house saved a $100 million movie.

Late 1998
Deep into production on Toy Story 2, the entire film lives on a shared studio server. Two years of work by hundreds of artists.

A single command
Someone runs a delete command on the wrong directory. On screen, the movie begins erasing itself. First Woody's hat, then his boots, then Woody himself, gone in seconds.

They pull the plug
Engineers yank the machine offline, but roughly 90% of the film is already deleted. Panic sets in.

Backups, the gut punch
They turn to the backups, only to discover they had been quietly failing for about a month. The safety net was not there.

The accidental hero
A technical director had recently had a baby and was working from home, so she kept a full copy of the film synced to a computer at her house, an off site backup, by happy accident.

Wrapped like a newborn
The team drives to her home, carefully wraps the computer in blankets, and transports it back to the studio like a fragile passenger. The film is saved.

~90%
of the film deleted by one command

~2 yrs
of work hanging in the balance

1 copy
off site, the only thing that saved it

The lesson for your business

Pixar did not survive on luck alone. They survived because, by accident, the **3, 2, 1 rule** was in play, an extra copy, on different hardware, stored off site. The real failure was the backup that ran for a month without anyone noticing it had stopped. **Do not be the company that finds out its backups are broken on the worst day of its life.** Test your restores, keep a copy off site, and never bet the business on a safety net you have not pulled on yourself.

CHAPTER 03

SECURE · THE RISE SERIES

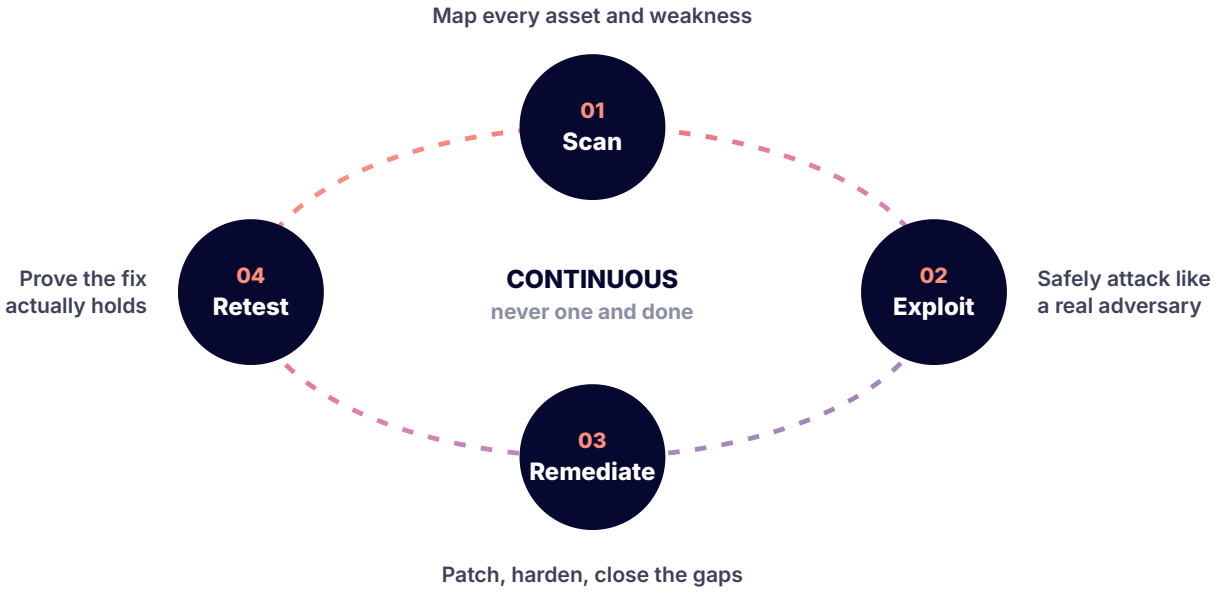
03

Test It Before They Do.

You do not know a wall holds until someone tries to break it. So we try first. Pen testing and breach simulation turn unknown weaknesses into a fixed checklist, on your terms.

Hardening is a habit, not a one time event.

Threats change weekly, so testing cannot be a once a year box to tick. The strongest networks run a continuous loop, probing themselves the way a real attacker would, then closing every gap they find.



THREE WAYS TO TEST, AND WHEN TO USE EACH

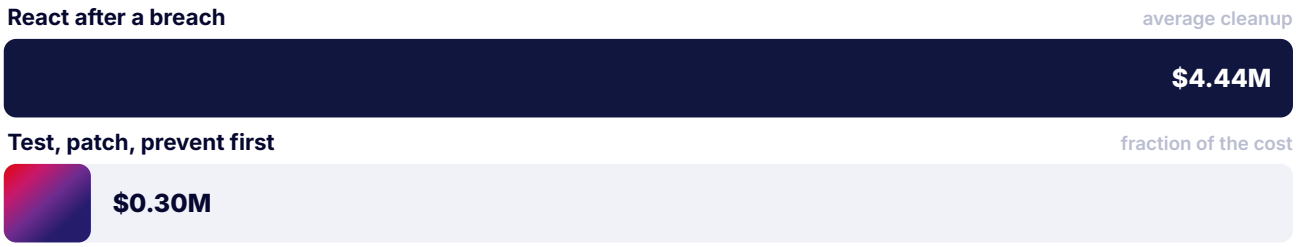
	Vulnerability scan	Penetration test	Breach simulation
What it does	Lists known weak spots automatically	Ethical hackers try a real break in	Runs constant, safe mock attacks
How often	Continuously	A few times a year	Always on, every day
Finds the unknown	✗	✓	✓
Tests your response	✗	Some	✓
Best for	Baseline hygiene	Deep, point in time proof	Ongoing assurance

CHAPTER 3 · THE MATH

Finding the crack yourself is far cheaper than letting them.

Most damaging breaches walk in through a door that was already known to be weak. Proactive testing flips the economics entirely. You spend a little to find issues on a Tuesday, instead of spending everything to survive a Friday night incident.

Cost of reacting vs cost of preventing



THE SECURITY MATURITY LADDER, WHERE DO YOU STAND?

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Exposed	**Reactive**	**Proactive**	**Resilient**
Basic antivirus, no monitoring, untested backups. Hope is the plan.	Tools in place, but you only act after something breaks. Always a step behind.	Layered defense, 24/7 monitoring, regular testing. You catch threats early.	Continuous testing, trained people, tested recovery. You bend, you do not break.

Most businesses sit at Level 2, and do not know it

They have bought the tools, so they feel covered. But owning a smoke detector is not the same as testing it. The goal of a secure framework is to move you up the ladder to **resilient,** where an incident is a manageable event, not an existential one.

CHAPTER 04

SECURE · THE RISE SERIES

04

Your People Are The Perimeter.

The most advanced firewall in the world still cannot stop someone from clicking a convincing email. Your team is either your weakest link or your strongest defense. Training decides which.

Most breaches do not break in. They get invited in.

Attackers learned long ago that it is easier to fool a person than to defeat a system. The good news, the very same people are also your fastest, cheapest layer of defense, once they know what to look for.



of all breaches involve a human action, a click, a reply, a mistake

Verizon DBIR 2025

<60s	median time to fall for a phishing email once it lands
16%	of breaches begin with phishing as the very first move
90%+	of account attacks blocked by multi factor authentication

SOCIAL ENGINEERING, DECODED

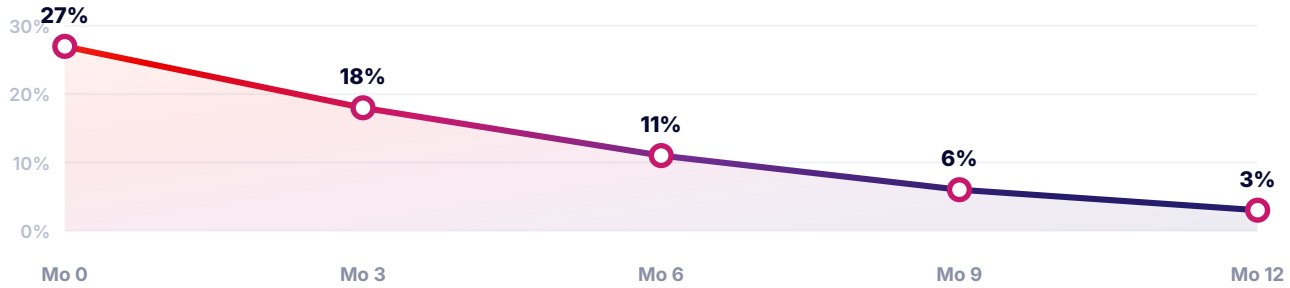
Tactic	How it works	The tell
Phishing	A fake email or text urges you to click or log in	Urgency, odd sender, links that do not match
Spear phishing	A targeted message using your real details	Too personal, asks you to break normal process
Business email compromise	A spoofed boss or vendor requests a payment	New bank details, pressure to keep it quiet
Pretexting	A believable story to extract info or access	A stranger who needs something fast

A trained team is the highest return security you can buy.

Awareness training is not a yearly video nobody watches. Done well, it is a steady drumbeat that rewires habits. The payoff shows up fast, and it compounds.

Phishing click rate falls as training takes hold

ILLUSTRATIVE



Teach the basics

Short, regular lessons on spotting fakes, building passwords, and reporting anything odd.

Test with real lures

Safe, simulated phishing that shows who clicks, with coaching instead of blame.

Track and improve

Click rates fall month over month as habits stick and awareness becomes second nature.

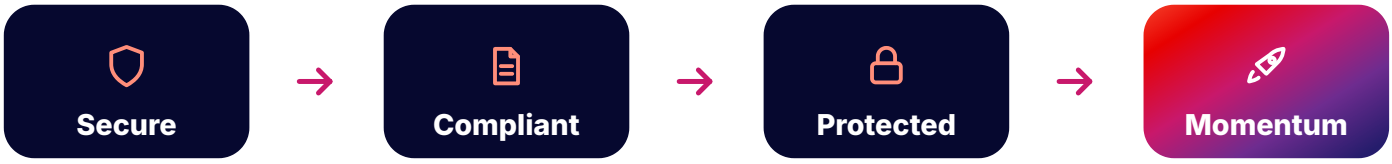
Make it culture

Reporting a suspicious email becomes a win, not an embarrassment. Everyone owns security.

THE PAYOFF

Secure is not the goal. It is what frees you to move.

A secure foundation makes compliance almost automatic, compliance protects your business and your data, and a protected business is free to do the one thing that matters most, keep building momentum.



YOUR SECURE FRAMEWORK, ON ONE CHECKLIST

- **Layered endpoint protection**
  EDR or MDR on every device, watched around the clock
- **Multi factor everywhere**
  The single cheapest block against stolen passwords
- **Tested 3, 2, 1 backups**
  Restores proven, not assumed, with a copy off site
- **24/7 monitoring and response**
  Someone watching when you are asleep
- **Regular testing**
  Scans, pen tests, and simulations on a schedule
- **Security awareness training**
  Your people turned into a human firewall
- **Least privilege access**
  People reach only what they actually need
- **A written incident plan**
  Everyone knows their role before the bad day

ONE FOUNDATION, MANY FRAMEWORKS

CMMC | HIPAA | NIST | SOC 2 | PCI DSS | GDPR

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

• RISE · S is for Secure

Your secure foundation starts with one conversation.

Solution Builders designs cybersecurity from the ground up, endpoints, detection, recovery, testing, and the human firewall, all working as one framework. Let us show you where you stand on the maturity ladder, and exactly how to make your momentum unbreakable.

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Figures cited from IBM Cost of a Data Breach 2025, Verizon Data Breach Investigations Report 2025, and published SMB security research. The Toy Story 2 account is drawn from "Creativity, Inc." by Ed Catmull. Charts marked illustrative are for explanation, not forecasts.

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

PART FOUR
THE RISE SERIES · COMPLETE EDITION

RISE · E is for Evolving

The AI Advantage.

Agents, copilots, and a little bit of nerve, turning the same team into a faster, sharper, more profitable one.

R	I	S	**E**
Resilient	**Integrated**	**Secure**	**Evolving**
Cloud, continuity, backup	Infrastructure, services	Cybersecurity	AI

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

2026 EDITION
An eBook on the Evolving enterprise

RISE · E is for Evolving

The AI Advantage.

How agents, copilots, and a little bit of nerve turn the same team into a faster, sharper, more profitable one. A field guide to working in the new era of intelligence.

INSIDE THE GUIDE

01 / A short, fun history of AI

02 / What AI does for your business today

03 / Choosing your AI stack, compared

04 / The future, and a peek at quantum

PUBLISHED BY

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RESILIENT · INTEGRATED · SECURE · EVOLVING

Your technology partner for what comes next

WHAT'S INSIDE

Four chapters, built to be useful.

No fluff, no jargon for its own sake. We start with how we got here, show you exactly what AI can do across your business, compare the tools you have already heard of, then look down the road at where this is all going.

01 A short history of AI — PAGE 03

From a 1950s summer workshop to the agents on your desktop. The story, the leaps, and why it suddenly feels different.

02 What AI does for business now — PAGE 06

The real work AI handles today, department by department, plus the rise of agents that act, not just answer.

03 Choosing your AI stack — PAGE 09

Copilot, ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and friends, compared head to head, plus a real case study of hours and revenue.

04 The future, and quantum — PAGE 13

Where AI heads next, the no AI versus AI growth gap, and a friendly introduction to quantum computing.

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

CHAPTER 01

01

Where it all began.

AI is not new. It is a seventy year old idea that spent decades waiting for the world to catch up. Then, almost overnight, the data, the chips, and the math all showed up at the same party. Here is the quick version of how a research curiosity became the most useful tool on your team.

1956
The summer the term artificial intelligence was coined

70 yrs
From research lab idea to everyday business tool

3
Big leaps got us here: rules, learning, language

2022
The year AI walked out of the lab and into the office

01 / THE STORY SO FAR

Seventy years in seven beats.

Each beat below unlocked something the last one could not do. Notice the gaps get shorter. That acceleration is the whole point.

1950s

The dream and the dare

Alan Turing asks if machines can think. A 1956 workshop names the field. Optimism is sky high, computers are room sized, and patience runs out fast.

1980s

Rules, and then a winter

Expert systems hard code human know how into if then rules. Useful, but brittle. When the hype outruns reality, funding freezes. The field learns humility.

1997

Machines start to win

IBM's Deep Blue beats world champion Garry Kasparov at chess. Proof that, given the right problem, a machine can outplay the very best of us.

2012

Deep learning clicks

Neural networks plus graphics chips plus oceans of data teach computers to see. Image recognition leaps forward and the modern AI boom quietly begins.

2017

The transformer arrives

A research paper titled Attention Is All You Need introduces the transformer, the architecture behind every modern chatbot. This is the spark for everything next.

2022

AI meets everyone

ChatGPT launches and reaches a hundred million users faster than any product in history. Suddenly your accountant, your marketer, and your kid are all using AI.

Today

The age of agents

AI stops just answering and starts doing. Agents draft, research, book, reconcile, and follow up on their own. That is the chapter your business gets to write.

01 / WHY IT FEELS DIFFERENT

From rules, to learning, to reasoning.

For decades AI could only follow rules a human wrote. Today it learns patterns from data and reasons through problems in plain language. Three forces finally lined up to make that leap real.

What finally changed

A

An ocean of data

Every email, document, and click became training fuel. AI got something to learn from at a scale no human could match.

B

Cheaper compute

Graphics chips made the heavy math affordable. Work that needed a supercomputer now runs in a browser tab.

C

A smarter design

The transformer let models understand context, not just keywords. That is why AI can now hold a real conversation.

Three eras at a glance

THEN

Rule based

If this, then that. A human writes every rule. Powerful inside a box, lost the moment reality steps outside it.

→

RECENT

Machine learning

Show it thousands of examples and it learns the pattern. Great at prediction, but narrow and hungry for labeled data.

→

NOW

Generative and agentic

It writes, reasons, and acts in plain language across almost any task. One tool, a thousand jobs, ready on day one.

Where this fits in RISE

AI is the **E in RISE, Evolving**. It sits on top of a foundation that is Resilient, Integrated, and Secure. Get those right and AI becomes a force multiplier. Skip them and it becomes a fast way to make expensive mistakes.

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

CHAPTER 02

02

What AI does for you now.

Forget the science fiction. The useful version of AI is already sitting in your inbox, your spreadsheets, and your support queue. This chapter is a tour of the real work it handles today, plus the leap from tools that answer to agents that act.

60 sec
From blank page to a solid first draft

24/7
Agents work nights and weekends without overtime

9 of 10
Knowledge tasks now have an AI assist available

Day 1
Value starts the moment your team logs in

02 / AROUND THE BUSINESS

Every team has a job AI can lighten.

AI is not one feature for one department. It is a layer of help across the whole company. Here is where it earns its keep first, by giving each team back the hours they spend on the repetitive stuff.

Sales

Drafts tailored outreach, summarizes every call, updates the CRM, and surfaces the next best account to call before you ask.

Marketing

Turns one idea into a campaign, blog, and ten social posts in your voice, then reads the analytics and tells you what to do next.

Finance

Reconciles transactions, flags odd invoices, builds the first pass of a forecast, and explains the variance in plain English.

Operations

Writes standard procedures, triages tickets, schedules work, and turns a messy email thread into a clean action list in seconds.

Customer support

Answers common questions instantly, drafts replies for tricky ones, and hands the human a full summary so nobody repeats themselves.

People and IT

Onboards new hires, answers policy questions, drafts job posts, and writes the help desk article before the same ticket lands twice.

The pattern under all of it

Look closely and every example is the same move: take a task that is repetitive, text heavy, or research heavy, and let AI do the first ninety percent so your people spend their time on the last ten that actually needs them.

02 / THE BIG SHIFT

From chatbot to coworker.

A chatbot answers a question and waits. An agent takes a goal, makes a plan, uses your tools, checks its own work, and comes back when the job is done. That difference is the whole story of the next few years.

How an agent actually works

1 **Understand** — Takes a goal in plain language

→

2 **Plan** — Breaks it into ordered steps

→

3 **Act** — Uses your apps and data

→

4 **Check** — Reviews and corrects itself

→

5 **Deliver** — Hands back finished work

And the loop repeats, because a good agent keeps a human in the seat for approvals that matter ↻

What turns a tool into a teammate

⚡

It can act

Connected to your email, files, and line of business apps, so it does the task, not just describe it.

🧠

It can reason

Handles many steps and changing conditions without a human scripting every branch in advance.

🔒

It stays in bounds

Works inside the guardrails and permissions you set, so Secure stays Secure while it works.

AGENTS ALREADY ON THE JOB

- Inbox triage
- Meeting notes and follow ups
- Invoice matching
- Lead research
- Ticket resolution
- Report generation
- Onboarding checklists
- Data cleanup

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

CHAPTER 03

03

Choosing your AI stack.

Copilot, ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and a growing crowd behind them. They overlap, but each has a sweet spot. This chapter compares them side by side, shows which tool fits which job, then puts real numbers on the hours and revenue at stake.

5
Serious tools worth knowing by name

1
Already lives inside your Microsoft 365

~1.5 hr
Freed per person each week, per Forrester

4.5x
Three year ROI reported for small business

03 / THE CONTENDERS

The big four, plus one, side by side.

No single tool wins everything. If your business runs on Microsoft 365, Copilot has a real home field advantage because it works inside the apps you already use and is grounded in your own data. Here is the honest lay of the land.

TOOL	BEST FOR	WHERE IT LIVES	STANDOUT STRENGTH	KEEP IN MIND
Microsoft 365 Copilot TOP PICK FOR M365	Teams that run on Microsoft 365 every day	Inside Word, Excel, Outlook, Teams, and PowerPoint	Grounded in your own company data through Microsoft Graph	Needs a base license and tidy file permissions to shine
ChatGPT OpenAI	General drafting, brainstorming, and quick answers	Web, mobile app, and a large developer ecosystem	Huge ecosystem with custom GPTs, images, and voice	Sits outside your company data unless you connect it
Claude Anthropic	Long documents, careful reasoning, and coding	Web, app, API, and built into tools like this one	Large context window and thoughtful, on brand writing	A smaller plug in ecosystem than ChatGPT today
Gemini Google	Teams that live in Google Workspace and research	Inside Gmail, Docs, Sheets, and Google Search	Deep Google integration and very large context	Best payoff if Workspace is your home base, not M365
Perplexity	Fast research you can actually trust and verify	Web and mobile app	Answers come with clickable sources attached	A focused research tool, not a full work suite

Why we lean Copilot for most clients

If your business already pays for Microsoft 365, Copilot meets your team where they work, respects the permissions you already set, and answers using your real files and emails. That home field advantage is hard to beat.

What it tends to cost

Microsoft 365 Copilot for businesses under three hundred users runs about **18 to 21 dollars per user each month** on top of a base Microsoft 365 license. The enterprise add on is about **30 dollars per user**. List pricing moves, so confirm current rates before you budget.

Tool strengths reflect each vendor's public positioning as of mid 2026. Pricing per Microsoft list rates, mid 2026. Always verify current pricing.

03 / RIGHT TOOL, RIGHT JOB

Which AI for which job.

Match the tool to the task and the value jumps. The dots below show where each one is a best fit, a solid option, or just okay. Notice Copilot owns the work that lives inside Microsoft 365.

THE JOB TO BE DONE	COPILOT	CHATGPT	CLAUDE	GEMINI	PERPLEXITY
Drafting in Word and Outlook	●●●	●●○	●●○	●●○	○○○
Crunching data in Excel	●●●	●●○	●●○	●●○	○○○
Reading long documents	●●○	●●○	●●●	●●●	●○○
Deep research with sources	●●○	●●○	●●○	●●○	●●●
Coding and automation	●●○	●●●	●●●	●●○	○○○
Meeting notes and follow ups	●●●	●○○	●●○	●●○	○○○
Creative and brand voice	●●○	●●●	●●●	●●○	○○○
Working with your own company data	●●●	●○○	●○○	●●○	○○○

●●● Best fit ●●○ Solid option ●○○ Just okay

The rule of thumb we give clients

Start with Copilot for the everyday work that lives in Microsoft 365, because it is grounded in your data and your team is already in those apps. Reach for a specialist when the job calls for it: Claude or ChatGPT for heavy writing and code, Gemini if you live in Google, and Perplexity when you need sources you can click. One stack, the right tool for each task.

03 / THE PAYOFF IN NUMBERS

A case study in hours and dollars.

Meet a fifty person professional services firm. Same people, same clients, now with AI in the daily workflow. Research on Microsoft 365 Copilot for small business points to roughly ninety minutes freed per person each week. Here is what that adds up to across the whole team.

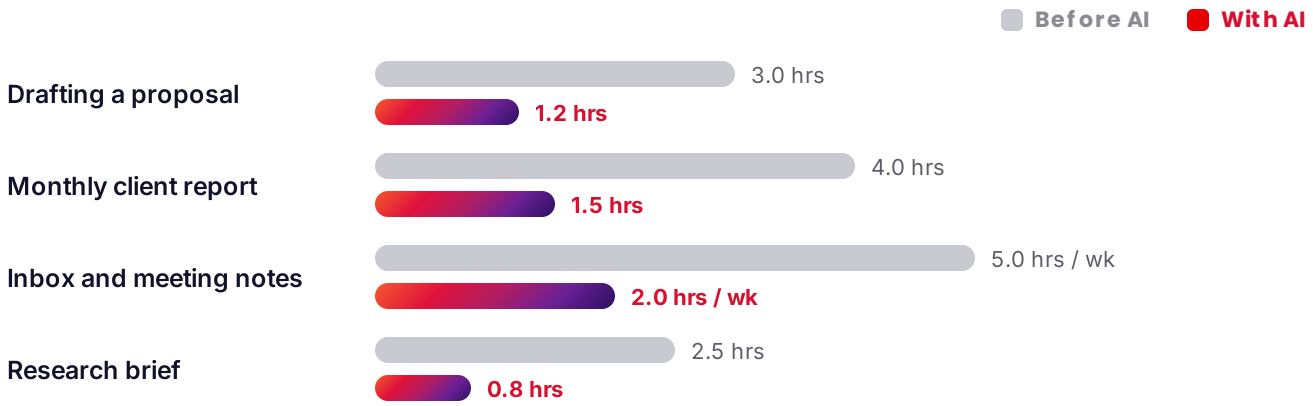
1.5 hrs
Freed per person, every single week

3,750
Hours reclaimed across the team each year

~$280K
Capacity unlocked at a blended rate of 75 dollars

4.5x
Three year return reported for small business

Where the time comes back



Hours are not the prize. What you do with them is.

Those reclaimed hours are not about working less. They are capacity. The same fifty people can take on more clients, answer faster, and chase the work that actually grows revenue, without adding a single headcount. That is how a cost becomes an investment.

Per person time saved based on Forrester Total Economic Impact research on Microsoft 365 Copilot for small business. Firm level figures are an illustrative model for a fifty person team, not a guarantee.

SOLUTION BUILDERS®

CHAPTER 04

04

The road ahead.

AI is not finished. It is barely warmed up. In this last chapter we look at where it heads next, put the no AI versus AI growth gap on a chart, and take a friendly first look at quantum computing, the technology waiting just over the horizon.

Agentic
AI that pursues goals, not just prompts

Multimodal
It sees, hears, and speaks, not only text

Personal
Tuned to your business, your data, your voice

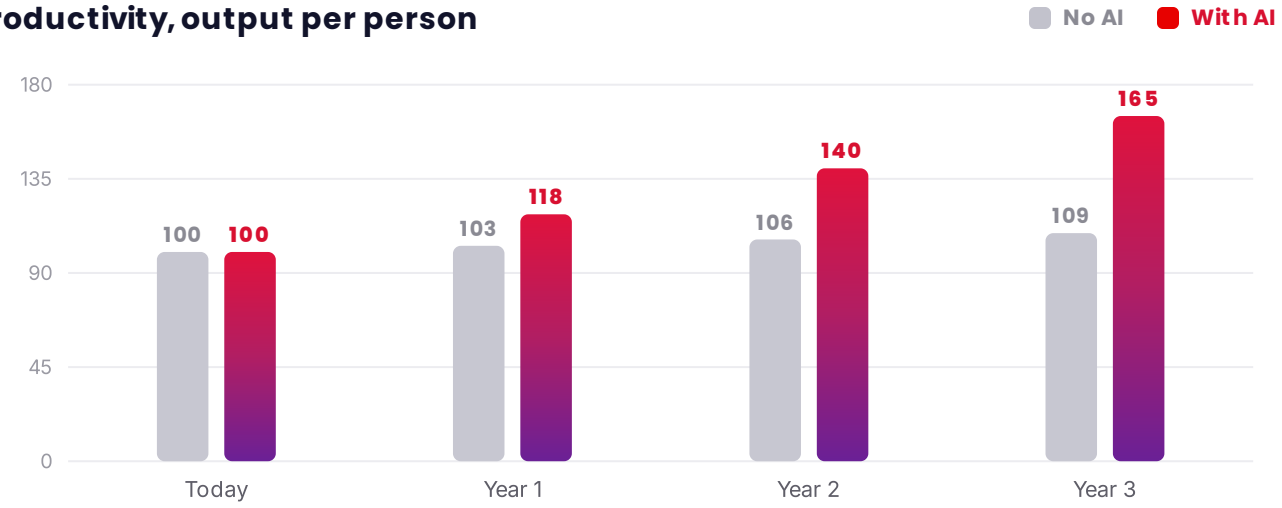
Quantum
The next leap in raw computing power

04 / THE GROWTH GAP

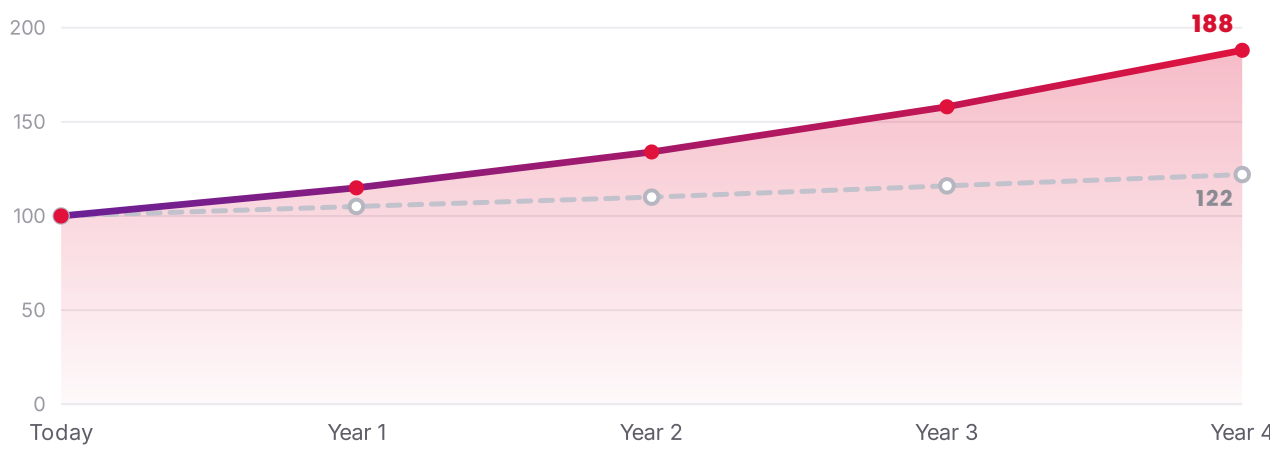
No AI versus AI, over time.

Standing still is not staying even, it is falling behind. The teams that adopt AI compound their advantage year after year while everyone else inches along. Here is that gap, for both productivity and revenue.

Productivity, output per person



Revenue, indexed to today



Illustrative model indexed to 100 at year zero. Curves show the compounding effect of sustained AI adoption versus none. Your results depend on adoption, data quality, and use case.

04 / OVER THE HORIZON

A quick word on quantum.

Quantum computing is the next big leap, and it is easier to grasp than the headlines suggest. A normal computer thinks in bits that are either on or off. A quantum computer uses qubits that can be both at once, which lets it explore a staggering number of possibilities in parallel.

TODAY'S COMPUTERS

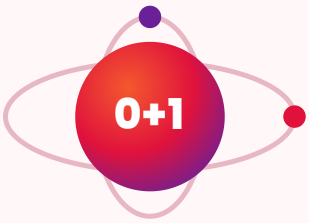
The bit, on or off

0 or 1

One definite answer at a time. Add bits and you add steps. Hard problems can take longer than the age of the universe.

QUANTUM COMPUTERS

The qubit, both at once



A blend of both states, called superposition. Many qubits explore countless paths together, then collapse to the best answer.

What it means for you

🚀

It could unlock

Breakthroughs in materials, drug discovery, logistics, and the kind of optimization that is simply out of reach today.

🔒

It touches Secure

One day quantum could crack today's encryption. Planning the move to quantum safe security now is simple, smart hygiene.

⏳

When to care

Useful business machines are still years out. No panic, no rush. Stay curious, keep your data tidy, and watch the space.

AI and quantum, better together

The exciting part is the pairing. Quantum could one day train AI models that are impossible today, while AI helps tame the finicky job of running quantum hardware. For now, the smart move is to master AI, the leap you can use this quarter.

RISE · E is for Evolving

Let's build your AI advantage.

AI rewards the teams that start. Not with a giant leap, but with one workflow, one agent, one win, then the next. The tools are ready, the gap is real, and the best time to move is now. We would love to help you do it the Solution Builders way: Resilient, Integrated, Secure, and most of all, Evolving.

01

Find the quick wins

We map the tasks where AI saves the most hours first.

02

Roll out safely

Copilot and agents, set up inside your guardrails.

03

Measure and grow

Track the hours saved, then scale what works.

START THE CONVERSATION

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