

THE EVERYTHING · FIELD GUIDES FOR TRADE BUSINESSES

The AI Mechanic Playbook

How to run a workshop in the age of AI

— and become the mechanic a driver actually trusts.

THE COMPLETE SYSTEM · NO FLUFF · FREE TO SHARE

THE EVERYTHING

Read this first

Ten years ago, running a good workshop meant someone on the phone taking bookings, a bookkeeper, and still writing up jobs and chasing invoices at the workbench after the roller door was down.

Today, a good mechanic with the right setup answers every driver's call the moment it lands — even mid-job with his hands full — books the car in, sends the honest quote after the look, and turns one repair into that driver's whole household and everyone they tell — while a bigger shop across town is still returning voicemails. And he spends zero nights on paperwork.

He's not smarter than you. He's not better with a scan tool. And he's definitely not a computer person — one of the best we've seen was still writing jobs in a grease-stained diary two years ago. He just worked out one thing before everyone else: **the boring half of the business** — the calls, the bookings, the follow-ups, the honest quotes, the approval-before-extra-work, the invoices — can now do itself. So he put his energy where the money and the reputation are: on diagnosing straight, doing the work properly, and becoming the mechanic a driver trusts enough to send their whole family to.

This is the playbook for how he does it. No “50 prompts to copy”. No tech-bro nonsense. The actual system — how to think about it, what to set up, in what order, and the mistakes that make good mechanics give up before it clicks. Read it start to finish and you'll run a tighter, more profitable, better-trusted workshop than you do right now, even if you never spend a cent on software.

A STRAIGHT WORD ON WHAT STAYS YOURS

Nothing in here diagnoses a car, decides what a repair needs, or replaces your trade, your hands or your judgement in the workshop. It carries the admin. What's actually wrong with the car, what needs doing now versus what can safely wait, whether a noise is a worn bearing or nothing, and whether a car's safe to hand back is a call you make on the hoist — never a number a computer invents. Doing the work right is your craft. And being straight with a driver — telling them plainly what the car needs, never inventing work to pad the bill, and ringing for the OK before you do anything extra you find — stays with you. All of it stays yours, start to finish.

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01

CHAPTER ONE

The New Playing Field

A driver ringing round because their car's playing up can't see under your bonnet or watch you work. They judge you on what they can reach — and that's where most workshops quietly lose the customers who'd have stayed for life.

Your customer is usually a driver with a problem and no way to get around — the car won't start, there's a light on the dash, a noise that's got them worried, a service or a rego check due — and, crucially, most of them don't understand cars. So the one thing they're really afraid of isn't the price. It's **being ripped off**: the shop that invents problems, upsells repairs they don't need, or pads the bill with work they can't check. The whole trade wears that reputation, which is exactly why the honest mechanic wins so big. The job goes to whoever gets three things right first:

- 1 **Did you answer — and can you look at it soon?** A stranded or worried driver rings whoever picks up and can see the car. Let it ring out and they ring the next shop, or get towed somewhere else — and that car, and every car in their house, goes with it.
- 2 **Will you be straight with me?** The driver's real fear is being taken for a ride. A mechanic who diagnoses it properly, tells them plainly what needs doing now and what can wait, and never invents work beats a cheaper shop they don't trust — because they can't tell if the cheaper shop is honest, and that scares them more than the money.
- 3 **Will you get me back on the road?** They need the car. The mechanic who books them in fast, keeps them posted, and hands it back sorted — with a clear, honest bill — is the one they'll never shop around again.

Notice what none of those are about? Being the cheapest quote. All three are about being reachable, being straight, and getting them going again — the exact stuff a padding shop can't fake. And the other side already runs on AI. The question isn't whether AI comes into the workshop — it's whether it's working for you or against you.

The good news? This is the first time the technology favours the small operator. The big franchised chains run committees, rollouts and training programs. You can decide on a Tuesday and be answering first by Friday. The playing field just flipped: the honest, one- or two-hoist workshop can now look and perform like the national chain — without the overheads, and without a driver ever getting a voicemail when they're stuck on the side of the road.

“But I'm not a computer person”

Neither are the trades doing this best. One of the fastest adopters we've seen is a trade-business owner with 26 years on the tools who only picked up a computer three years ago. His words: **“Don't worry about spelling. Don't worry about grammar.”** If you can send a text or leave a voice message, you can run everything in this playbook. Being able to say what you want is the new requirement — and mechanics, who talk a nervous driver through what's wrong and what it'll cost every day, are already good at that.

**\$200–
800**
+ per month

What workshop-management software commonly charges in AUD — and it still makes you do the typing and the chasing. One owner was paying a grand a month for tools his team barely used. Everything in this playbook either replaces that spend or makes it earn its keep.

The chains three times your size are slow because they're big. That's your opening. This playbook is about walking through it.

02

CHAPTER TWO

Think AI-First

Before we touch a single tool, we need to fix how you think about this — because the biggest mistake isn't buying the wrong software. It's bolting AI onto your old way of working and wondering why nothing changed.

Every process in your workshop was built on one assumption: a human has to do each step. Someone answers the call. Someone books the car in and writes up the job. Someone tracks the parts, the quotes, the follow-ups, the rego reminders. Your whole day is shaped around that assumption — and that assumption just died.

Don't automate your old process. Re-draw it — with the AI touching everything first, and you supervising. Three mental shifts:

Shift one — delegate outcomes, not steps

Stop thinking “which buttons do I click”. You now talk to your workshop the way you'd talk to a good apprentice: say the outcome, let it work out the steps. One owner reorders parts by sending one message from the counter — “grabbing brake pads and a rotor set for the Corolla” — and the order, the expense and the books sort themselves.

Shift two — AI first, you second

The AI does the first pass of everything, and you approve, tweak or overrule. The quote is drafted before you're off the hoist. One owner described it: **“Nine times out of ten it's perfect. Just go — yep, send.”** Your job shrinks to ten seconds of judgment, not forty minutes of typing.

Shift three — corrections are investments

With normal software, you fix the same mistake forever. With AI, you fix it once. Tell it a job never gets a firm price until the car's been looked at, that a quote always separates what needs doing now from what can safely wait, and that you always ring for the OK before doing any extra work found on the hoist — and it answers, **“I'll remember that from now on.”** Every correction compounds. Six months in, it quotes like you, writes like you and knows your rules — because you taught it, once.

The re-imagining exercise

Walk your workshop and ask one question about every interaction: “What would this look like if the AI touched it first?”

INTERACTION	THE OLD WAY	AI-FIRST
Driver rings, stuck, while you're under a car	Voicemail. They ring the next shop or get towed elsewhere.	Answered and calmed, the car booked in, the problem captured — a straight steer by the time you're off the hoist.
A rego or service is coming due	You forget to remind them, they drift to a chain.	The reminder sent in your name — “your Hilux is due its rego check, want us to book it in?”
Supplier price-list update lands	Buried under 200 emails. Old part prices on your next quote.	Extracted, applied to your rates — “pads and filters up, quotes adjusted.”
A job's done	Car handed back, follow-up never sent.	The service logged, the review asked, the next service and the household's other car teed up.

Every chapter from here is just this exercise applied to one part of your workshop.

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CHAPTER THREE

Never Miss a Job Again

Let's start with the leak that costs you the most and hurts the least — because you never see the bill.

The workshop lead is perishable, and often panicked: a driver whose car won't start or has a light on the dash rings whoever picks up and can see it soon, and the shop that doesn't answer never hears from them again. The call buzzes at 8am while you're under a car with your hands full of grease. It rings out. That driver rings the next workshop, books it in, and now that car — and their partner's car, and the work ute, and everyone they'd have told — belongs to someone else. Gone, and not just this job: often a whole household's servicing for years, handed to whoever answered.

First in

wins the car

A driver with a problem car rings whoever picks up and can look at it soon — they've already decided to get it fixed; they're only choosing who. A missed call isn't a deferred sale — it's the car, and often the whole household's cars behind it, handed to whoever answered. And slow response drags your search ranking down, so it costs you the next one too.

Voicemail is where the loyal customers of the year go to die. The AI-first fix is bigger — because an enquiry is really two problems.

Problem one — the call you couldn't take

An AI receptionist answers in your workshop's name, 24/7, sounds calm and reassuring to a stressed driver, and captures every detail — the car, what it's doing, when it started, whether it's driveable or needs a tow, whether it's a service, a rego check or a breakdown — while you're under a car or asleep. And it does the thing that wins the job: it answers first, every time, so you're the workshop that books the car in while the others are still on voicemail.

Problem two — the customer nobody kept

A workshop isn't won on one repair — it's won on becoming the mechanic a household trusts with every car, and the name they give a friend the moment someone asks “who's your mechanic?”. Most shops do a job and never think past it. The one who answers first, is straight about what the car needs, and hands it back sorted is the one that driver brings the next car to, and sends their whole family and half their workmates.

- ✓ Every call answered in your workshop's name — including after hours, including the weekend breakdown, including the regular ringing about their partner's car.
- ✓ A searchable record of every car — “what did we do on the Nguyen Corolla last time, and which customers are due a service or a rego reminder?”
- ✓ Follow-ups and reminders that keep you in front of the people who matter — so when the next service or the next problem comes up, you're the one they ring, not a chain.
- ✓ Job details from the call — the car, the rego, the symptom — flow straight onto the job card, not re-typed three times.

The phone stops being the thing that costs you loyal customers and becomes the thing that books the car — and keeps you the mechanic they call for every car in the house.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Quote It Straight — No Phantom Repairs

Quoting is where a mechanic wins or loses the trust the whole job runs on — because the driver can't see what's wrong, doesn't understand it, and is terrified you'll invent work to pad the bill. Get this right and you're the mechanic they never shop around again.

Diagnose first, then straight

and no phantom repairs

Most car jobs can't be priced properly down the phone — you have to look at it. The honest move is a rough steer, then “bring it in and we'll tell you straight what it needs before we touch it.” Then the thing that makes or breaks the trade: separate what needs doing NOW (it's unsafe or it'll leave them stranded) from what can safely WAIT, never invent work, and ring for the OK before doing anything extra you find on the hoist. The padding shop upsells a filter, a flush and a phantom noise; the honest one tells them the brakes are fine for another 10,000 and only does what the car needs. That honesty is the whole business.

Here's the truth of this trade: **a driver can't judge whether a repair is real — so they judge whether YOU are.** Every straight answer, every “that can wait, don't spend the money yet”, every job that comes in at the quote builds the one thing a padding shop can never fake. That's what makes them bring the next car, and send their family.

AI-first quoting makes the honesty effortless: the AI helps you get the car in and quote it straight. Here's what that looks like in a real workshop today.

- ✓ **It books the look, not a blind price.** From the call, the AI captures the car and the symptom and books it in — “we'll take a look and tell you straight what it needs” — instead of guessing a number over the phone.
- ✓ **It quotes from YOUR structure.** Feed it your past jobs and it learns your labour rates and part prices — and drafts a clear quote that separates the must-do-now from the can-wait, so nothing looks like padding.
- ✓ **It writes it in plain words.** A quote a non-car-person actually understands — what's wrong, what it needs, what it doesn't — is what turns a nervous driver into a customer for life.

“That can wait — don't spend it yet”

the honesty that keeps them

Here's the trust-maker of this trade: the padding shop finds five things wrong and does all of them. The honest mechanic looks at the same car and says “the brakes have got plenty left, the noise is nothing, all it really needs is the service — save your money.” It costs him that sale. It wins him the customer for a decade, plus their partner's car, the work ute, and everyone they tell. Telling a driver what their car *doesn't* need is a stronger pitch than any discount — and it's exactly what brings the whole household and the “you've got to try my mechanic” referral.

Getting the OK before the extra work isn't friction — it's the sell

When you find something extra on the hoist — a seized caliper, a perished belt — the move is to ring before you do it: what it is, what it costs, whether it needs doing now or can wait. Framed right, that's not a hold-up — it tells a driver you'll never do work they didn't approve or spring a surprise line on the invoice. “I found this, here's what it is and what it'll cost — your call” turns your honesty into the reason they trust you with every car they'll ever own.

Then the bit everyone skips — staying in front of the customer. One message a few months on: “Your Corolla's about due its next service, and your rego's coming up — want us to book both?” That single habit wins more repeat work than dropping your rate ever will. At first, that reminder isn't a thing you remember. It's a thing that just happens.

THE POINT ISN'T THE SOFTWARE

It's the standard: diagnose it straight, tell them what needs doing now and what can wait, never invent work, and get the OK before you do anything extra. A mechanic with a diary who hits that standard beats one with an app who pads bills. The AI just makes the honest standard effortless.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Get Paid Without the Awkward Chase

You've done the job. Now you've got to get paid — and in a workshop that's mostly the honest quote holding, no surprise line at the end, and the odd bigger repair where the driver needs to know the number before you start the work.

No surprise on the invoice

the quote is the bill

The single most reassuring thing you can do for a driver is make the invoice match the quote — and if something extra came up, they already said yes to it before you did it. A surprise line at the end is the exact thing that makes a customer feel ripped off and never come back, even if the work was fair. On a bigger repair, a clear quote approved before you start — and a deposit to order the parts if it's a big one — keeps everyone straight. Predictable, honest billing isn't just fair; it's your strongest reason to be trusted with the next car and recommended to their family.

The chasing is a system problem, not a people problem. Fix the system and you never have the awkward conversation again.

- 1 **Quote approved before the work.** Nothing gets done that the driver didn't say yes to — so the invoice is never a shock.
- 2 **A deposit for a big parts order.** On a major repair, a deposit to order the parts holds the job and covers you — cleanly, up front, agreed.
- 3 **Flag the extra before you touch it.** If you find something on the hoist, the driver hears what it costs and why *before* the work goes on. A phone call, not an ambush on the invoice.
- 4 **Escalate the tone only if you have to.** Most pay on nudge one or two. You stay the good guy the whole way.

Money is money: this is the one place you keep the AI on a short leash at the start. It drafts, you approve — until you've watched it be right for a month.

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CHAPTER SIX

The Inbox That Runs Itself

Your inbox is where quiet money leaks out and stress leaks in.

Parts supplier statements, a driver confirming a booking, a regular chasing when their car's ready, a rego-reminder reply, a photo of a dashboard light to look at, a review notification, a past customer with the next problem — all mixed in with junk, all landing while you're under a car with your hands full. One trade owner started with a backlog of 24,000 emails: "I'd read one email, it'd get lost. I wouldn't even be able to find it again."

AI-first, the inbox becomes something that's already handled by the time you look:

- ✓ **Triaged.** The three emails that matter today float to the top, flagged with why — "this one's a regular whose brakes you flagged last visit, chasing to book them in."
- ✓ **Drafted.** Routine replies — "yes, we can do your rego check Thursday", "the car's ready, here's the total" — written and waiting. You glance, tweak, send.
- ✓ **Answered on demand.** "What did we quote the Rossi clutch, and is the deposit in?" — and it finds it instantly.

THE PART NOBODY EXPECTS — IT GUARDS YOUR MONEY

Because the AI reads everything, it catches things. One business: "It's already saved me thousands in mis-ordered products — it said, hold on, based on your past jobs you probably want this one." Another had a supplier accidentally invoice at a 50% discrepancy — flagged automatically before it was paid.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Your Digital Service Advisor

Every workshop has a service advisor. Usually it's you, doing it badly at 10pm.

One week

no office admin

One trade business's admin person went on leave for a week. The owner: "We haven't had her in the office for a week, and it's helped us do her job." It ended up being one of their strongest weeks — not survive the week, one of their best — because the bookings, the reminders and the chasing didn't stop when she did.

The morning brief

Before you roll the door up: today's cars in order, which one needs its parts chased so it's not stuck on the hoist, which customer to ring with a quote, which rego or service reminder to send, who to chase for a deposit on a big job, and the one thing — a part on back-order, a car promised by lunch — that'll bite you if you forget it. Two minutes with a coffee — and your apprentice knows too.

Car histories that build themselves

Every job, quote and photo attaches itself to the right car and customer — so when they ring, the whole history's there. What you did last time, what you flagged to watch, what you charged, when it's next due — all in one place, so you never re-diagnose from scratch and never look like you've forgotten them.

The paperwork without the dread

The quote, the job card, the service record, the invoice — drafted, sent, and kept where you can find it, and there to show exactly what work was done and approved if anything's ever queried. Never a substitute for your diagnosis or your hands on the car — just stopped from going missing.

08

CHAPTER EIGHT

Look Twice as Big as You Are

Here's a secret the big chains rely on you not knowing: most of “looking professional” — and “looking like a mechanic who won't rip me off” — is presentation, and presentation is now nearly free.

A one-hoist workshop and a fifty-bay chain can send the identical, clear, branded quote — and show the same fast response, the same plain-English explanations, and the same real reviews from drivers who felt looked after. In a trade where a driver is trusting you with their safety and their wallet on something they can't check, the small operator who looks organised, answers fast and explains it straight gets trusted like the big chain — and kept for every car in the house.

The referral flywheel — on purpose, not by accident

- 1 Retain** — answer first, be straight, get them back on the road, so you're the mechanic that driver brings the next car to without shopping around.
- 2 Review** — ask for the Google review the moment a customer's happiest, the day they drive away sorted and not ripped off, automatically, with the link. Reviews and fast response lift your ranking — and a driver choosing a mechanic leans hard on both, because they're looking for one thing: proof you're honest.
- 3 Refer** — “who's your mechanic?” is one of the most trusted questions there is. People are desperate for a mechanic they can trust and tell everyone the moment they find one. Do one job straight and you don't get a customer — you get their partner's car, the work fleet, and half their street.
- 4 Resell** — this is the whole game. A car needs servicing forever, a rego every year, the next repair; a household has three cars. One honest job isn't a repair, it's years of servicing for a whole family. It's all in the car history. A reminder at the right time turns one job into a lifetime customer.

START TODAY — EVEN WITH ZERO TECH

Ask every customer for a review the day they drive away happy, and always leave the door open — “we'll remind you when it's due, and send your family our way.” A driver who's just been treated straight instead of ripped off is the most receptive you'll ever find them.

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CHAPTER NINE

The 30-Day Switch

Everything above works. The reason most mechanics don't get it working is they try to do it all at once, get overwhelmed mid-job, and go back to the old way. So: one thing at a time, without stopping work.

- 1 Week 1 — Stop the biggest leak: the missed call.** Every call answered and the car captured, a stranded driver calmed and booked in — and a rego or service reminder going out. This starts paying for the whole exercise immediately.
- 2 Week 2 — Fix quoting.** The AI books the look and drafts a straight quote from your structure that separates must-do-now from can-wait; you correct it — and every correction is a lesson it keeps. Diagnose before any firm number, get the OK before any extra work, follow up after every job.
- 3 Week 3 — Fix getting paid.** The invoice matching the quote, a deposit for big parts orders, extras approved before you touch them, automatic reminders — with you approving everything money-related until it's earned the leash.
- 4 Week 4 — Hand over the back office.** Inbox triaged and drafted, morning brief running, car histories and service records building themselves, reviews asked automatically, the next service and the household's other cars chased.

Why all four? Because one process never feels like much. Three is where the “holy hell” moment happens — because that's when the pieces start talking to each other. The call becomes the booking. The booking becomes the honestly-quoted, properly-done job. The job becomes the review, the payment, and the next car from the same household.

The trust dial — how to hand over without losing sleep

You don't hand a new apprentice a brake job on day one. Same here:

- 1 **Weeks 1–2: it asks about everything.** Every email draft, every quote — “here's what I'd send, OK?” You approve, correct, teach.
- 2 **Weeks 3–4: it asks about the important stuff.** Routine replies just go; money, new customers, and anything with weight — quotes, a diagnosis, an extra repair found on the hoist — still get your nod.
- 3 **Month two onward: it asks about exceptions.** Now it runs, and you get the morning brief and the flags. You're still the boss — you've just stopped being the bottleneck.

The mistakes that make good mechanics quit before it clicks

- ✓ **Doing all four weeks at once.** Don't. One a week. Each banks a win before you add the next.
- ✓ **Bolting AI onto the old process.** If you're still typing every job into the same old software and asking AI to “help”, you've missed the point. Re-draw the process (Chapter 2).
- ✓ **Reaching for fake urgency.** You don't need it — a real rego or service-due date, or a genuine safety issue that shouldn't wait, is honest urgency you can act on: “your rego's due this month, let's get it in.” A fake “today only” just makes you look like the shop that invents problems.
- ✓ **Competing on price.** The moment you win by being the cheapest, you're competing with the shop that skips the diagnosis and pads the bill — and the driver's real fear is being ripped off, not the rate. A driver pays for a mechanic they can trust with their safety and their money — being the honest one wins every car in the house, not the lowest quote.



BEFORE YOU PUT THIS DOWN

The 2-Minute Leak Audit

Most mechanics aren't short of skill — they're losing drivers. Your money isn't in winning strangers on a cheap price; it's in becoming the mechanic a household trusts with every car and tells their friends about, because one honest job is years of servicing and a whole family's cars. That's the tell: answer first, be straight, get them back on the road, and never pad a bill. Be honest — tick the ones that are true right now.

- ✓ I'm often slow to answer calls — and I don't know how many cars the delay has cost me.
- ✓ A driver's call has rung out and I never knew, and they booked the next shop or got towed elsewhere.
- ✓ A regular drifted to a chain because I never reminded them their rego or service was due.
- ✓ I've quoted a firm price over the phone on a car I hadn't looked at — and worn the loss.
- ✓ My quotes don't separate what needs doing now from what can wait, so I can look like I'm padding.
- ✓ I've done extra work I found without ringing first — and had a customer feel ambushed on the invoice.
- ✓ I don't stay in front of past customers, so the next service gets done by someone else.
- ✓ My quotes, car histories and what I flagged to watch live in my head and my diary, not in one place.
- ✓ My inbox stresses me out, and important stuff — a part on back-order, a car promised by lunch — gets buried.
- ✓ If a customer asked exactly what work I did and what they approved, it'd take me a while to find it.

0–2

Tight ship. A few tweaks and you're the mechanic more households trust with every car.

3–6

You're losing loyal customers in the boring half — and it's all fixable. Start with Week 1.

7+

Mate, you're doing the skilled, honest work and handing the customer to whoever answered first. Good news: it's exactly the stuff that's now easiest to fix.

The biggest lever isn't a cheaper price — it's answering first, being dead straight, and turning each car into the household's cars for years. Your biggest tick is your biggest opportunity. Start there.

Want it set up for you?

Everything in this playbook, you can build yourself — and you should, if you've got the time and the patience. Plenty do. If you'd rather it was just done — the AI that answers your phone the moment a driver rings, calms a stranded customer and books the car in, sends the rego and service reminders that keep a household coming back, drafts a straight quote that separates what needs doing now from what can wait, flags any extra work for the driver's OK before you touch it, keeps the car histories that show exactly what was done and approved, and chases the next service and the household's other cars from every customer you've looked after — all in one, working in your workshop this week — that's what we build. It's called .

- ✓ 14-day free trial. Cancel anytime. No fixed contracts, no catch.
- ✓ Nothing important — a quote, an invoice, a customer's message — ever goes out without you seeing it first.
- ✓ It lives in Microsoft Teams and the tools you already use.

See it working on your own jobs at the-everything-app.com — no credit card to look.

Honest note: this won't fix a broken business, and it won't diagnose the car, judge the repair, or decide what a car needs — that's still you, your eye, and your hands on the job. What it fixes is the office job you've been doing for free after dark.