The Tool Stack

The five tools I'd actually put in a small business, and what each one won't do.

Most tool guides start from the wrong end. They rank software by features and hype, then leave you to work out where any of it fits. Here's the view from someone who builds these systems into small businesses for a living: **there's no such thing as an overhyped tool. The worst tool you can buy is one that doesn't fit the business you already run.**

An email marketing platform won't produce an amazing campaign if you've never run one. The best video generation model on the market won't suddenly make you great at animation. Tools amplify what your business already does. They don't create a capability from nothing.

So this isn't a "best tools of the year" list. These are the five I'd put into almost any small business, because each one attaches to work you're already doing every day: talking, meeting, tracking, and repeating the same steps. And because nobody selling software will tell you this part, each one comes with an honest note on what it won't do.

The five at a glance

Tool	The job	In one line
Claude	The main AI	The one AI your whole business runs on, day to day.
Wispr Flow	Speaking	Talk instead of type, in any app, three to four times faster.
Fathom	Meetings	Every call recorded, summarised and searchable.
Airtable + Omni	Tracking	Your leads, jobs and pipeline in one place, with an AI to build it.
n8n	Plumbing	Moves information between your apps while you sleep.

TOOL 01 · THE MAIN AI

Claude by Anthropic · claude.ai

Try Claude →

Claude is the main AI I'd put at the centre of any small business, and it's the one I run my own on. It's good at thinking, but that's one part of a much wider job. It drafts, analyses and builds. Projects let it hold your business context, so it answers as someone who knows your company rather than a stranger on the internet. Artifacts let it build you real documents, pages and small working tools you can open and use. And Claude Code and Cowork let it work directly in your files: reading them, editing them, and carrying multi-step jobs from start to finish.

DAY TO DAY

- Drafts the email, the proposal, the quote, the job ad, then rewrites it in your voice.
- Reads the contract, the spreadsheet or the 40-page report and tells you what actually matters.
- Thinks decisions through with you: pricing, hiring, a tricky client reply, with all your notes in front of it.
- Builds working documents and simple tools on request, from a one-page report to a quote calculator.

Pricing: no-cost plan available. The Pro plan is around £15 a month; heavier plans exist for power users.

> ### WHAT IT WON'T DO
>
> Claude only knows what you give it. Without your context loaded, it's a very smart stranger: fluent, confident and generic. The quality of its answers tracks the quality of your input. And out of the box it won't run your business unattended. It works alongside you, and getting it to work while you sleep is a proper setup job, not a subscription feature.

Try Claude →

TOOL 02 · THE SPEAKING TOOL

Wispr Flow wisprflow.ai

Try Wispr Flow →

Wispr Flow is voice dictation that works in any app on your computer or phone. Hold a key, talk, and clean text appears wherever your cursor is: an email, WhatsApp, a document, a chat with Claude. It tidies as it goes, so a rambling thought comes out as sentences you'd actually send.

DAY TO DAY

- Speaking is roughly three to four times faster than typing, so the keyboard stops being the bottleneck between your head and the page.
- Your briefs to Claude get dramatically better, because talking for sixty seconds carries far more detail than typing two lines ever will.
- Emails and messages get answered on the spot instead of parked under "I'll reply properly later".
- Ideas get captured the moment they arrive: in the van, between viewings, walking to the next job.

Pricing: no-cost plan with a weekly word cap; the paid plan is around £12 a month.

> ### WHAT IT WON'T DO
>
> It transcribes and tidies. It doesn't think. If your brief is vague out loud, it will be vague on the page, just with better punctuation. Garbage brief in, garbage brief out. It also takes a few days to trust: talking to your computer feels odd right up until it doesn't.

Try Wispr Flow →

TOOL 03 · THE MEETING TOOL

Fathom fathom.video

Try Fathom →

Fathom sits in your video calls and records them. After each one you get the full transcript, a tight summary, and the action items pulled out for you. Your meetings stop being vibes and half a page of scribbles, and become a searchable record you can go back to months later.

DAY TO DAY

- No more note-taking on calls. You actually listen, which is where deals get won.
- "What did we agree with that supplier in March?" becomes a thirty-second search instead of archaeology.
- Action items land in a list at the end of every call instead of dying in your memory.
- It feeds the rest of the stack: paste a transcript into Claude and ask for the follow-up email or the proposal.

Pricing: the no-cost plan is genuinely useful (unlimited recordings and transcripts, capped AI summaries); the paid plan is around £15 a month.

> ### WHAT IT WON'T DO
>
> It captures, it doesn't chase. The action item still needs a system, or a person, behind it, and Fathom is neither. Plenty of businesses record every call and change nothing, because a searchable pile of transcripts is still a pile until something reads it and acts on it.

Try Fathom →

TOOL 04 · THE TRACKING TOOL

Airtable with Omni, its AI agent · airtable.com

Try Airtable →

Airtable is a database that looks and feels like a spreadsheet, which means your team will actually use it. It's where your leads, jobs, clients and pipeline live: one record per thing, linked together, viewable as tables, boards or calendars. Omni is the AI agent built into it. Describe what you want ("add a stage field to my leads", "show me every job overdue this week") and it builds and changes things in your base for you.

DAY TO DAY

- One place for the pipeline, so "where's that lead up to?" has exactly one answer.
- Different views for different people: sales sees a pipeline board, ops sees this week's jobs, same underlying data.
- Omni handles the building work that used to need a consultant or an afternoon on YouTube.
- It connects cleanly to almost everything else, including the plumbing tool on the next page.

Pricing: no-cost plan for small setups; the Team plan is around £15 per user per month.

> ### WHAT IT WON'T DO
>
> It won't design your process for you. Airtable holds whatever process you pour into it, and if that process is messy, you now have a beautifully organised mess. Omni builds what you describe, and describing the right thing is still your job. Sort out how the work should flow first, then put it in Airtable. In that order.

Try Airtable →

TOOL 05 · THE PLUMBING

n8n n8n.io

Try n8n →

n8n connects your apps so information moves without you touching it. A form gets filled in, the lead lands in your CRM, the welcome email goes out, and you hear about it afterwards. A payment comes in, the invoice is raised and the follow-up is scheduled. It's the tool that turns "I do that every single time" into "that happens by itself", and it runs while you sleep.

DAY TO DAY

- Kills the copy-paste jobs between apps: form to CRM, payment to invoice, enquiry to first reply.
- Speed you can't match by hand: a new lead gets a response in seconds, not whenever you next open the laptop.
- Every workflow you build compounds. Set it up once and it works every day from then on.
- It ties the whole stack together: Fathom call ends, Airtable record updates, Claude drafts the follow-up in the middle.

Pricing: cloud plans start around £18 a month; you can also self-host it cheaply if you have technical help.

> ### WHAT IT WON'T DO
>
> This one is real setup work. Of everything on this list, n8n is the tool owners most often pay someone to build for them, and there's no shame in that. And know this before you rely on one: a broken automation fails silently. The form stops reaching the CRM and nobody gets an error message, just fewer leads. Every automation needs an owner, and a way of telling you when it has died.

Try n8n →

Some links in this guide may be referral links. They cost you nothing, and I'd recommend every tool here regardless.

Three questions before you buy any tool

The five above pass these tests in most small businesses. Everything else you're considering should have to pass them too.

1. What existing work does this attach to?

If the answer is "none, but we've been meaning to start", put the card away. Tools amplify work that already happens. Start the habit by hand first, badly if necessary, then buy the tool that makes it faster.

2. Who in the business will actually open it every day?

A named person, not "the team". Software nobody opens is rent. If you can't picture the specific person and the specific moment in their day when they'll use it, you're buying shelf-ware with a login page.

3. What happens to the work it produces?

A transcript, a draft, a dashboard: each one is the middle of a job, never the end of it. Where does the output go next, and who acts on it? If it has no next step, the tool is generating homework, not progress.

The tools are the easy part. Making them fit your business is the work.

Every tool in this guide earns its keep in the right business and gathers dust in the wrong one, and the difference is never the software. It's whether it attaches to how your business actually runs.

If you want a straight answer, book a **30-minute AI assessment**. I'll look at how you work now and tell you plainly which of these five would save you the most time, and which to skip. I build for owners of service businesses turning over £1M to £10M a year, with 10 to 50 staff: trades, hire, hospitality, agencies, clinics, estate and letting agents. Every tool in this guide works in any industry.

Book your 30-minute AI assessment

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