

How to make generative AI work for businesses in 2026

Generative AI has moved from a buzzword to a business tool.

Many organisations are now looking beyond the initial hype and asking a practical question: how can we make this technology deliver real value?

As we look towards 2026, the focus is shifting from simply trying out generative AI to embedding it strategically into business operations.

For many, the biggest hurdle is knowing where to start.

Generative AI offers huge potential. It can transform the way you work, but it also brings new challenges around security, cost, and responsible use.

This guide will help you cut through the complexity.

We'll show you how to select the right models, manage the risks, and build solutions that give your business a genuine competitive edge.

The opportunities are bigger than you think

Generative AI is set to change how we work across many industries.

Projections suggest it could boost global GDP by nearly $7 trillion. For businesses like yours, this brings real and tangible opportunities.

You can use generative AI to automate complex tasks. It opens doors to new customer experiences and helps you unlock powerful insights from your data.

Imagine summarising lengthy reports in seconds. You could generate marketing copy that resonates with specific audiences, or even write code to speed up development cycles.

These are not futuristic concepts. They are practical applications that businesses are already building on AWS.

The key is to use your company's own data.

When you customise a generative AI model with your own business information, you create a powerful tool that understands your customers and your operations.

This customisation helps you stand out from the competition. It is where the real value lies.

Getting started: Choosing and customising your model

You do not need to build a new AI model from scratch for every task.

Instead, you can use what are known as foundation models (FMs). These are large, pre-trained models that you can adapt for your specific needs.

Think of foundation models as a flexible starting point on your AI journey.

There are a few common ways to work with these models:

Zero-shot learning: This is the simplest approach. You give the model a direct command, known as a prompt, without any prior examples. For instance, you might ask it to "translate this document into German" or "list the action items from this meeting transcript". Many FMs offer web-based interfaces that make this easy for anyone to use.

In-context learning: To get more relevant results, you can provide a few examples within your prompt. If you want to create a social media post, you could include examples of your company's previous successful posts. This helps the model understand your desired tone and style on the fly.

Fine-tuning: For more specialised tasks, you can fine-tune a model. This involves training it further with a small set of your own labelled data. For example, a recruitment firm could fine-tune a model with sample CVs to help it automatically generate candidate summaries. This approach is much more cost-effective than building a model from the ground up.

Navigating the challenges of generative AI

While the opportunities are exciting, it is important to be aware of the challenges.

A strategic approach starts with understanding the risks and planning how to manage them from the outset. This puts your business in the best position to succeed as you adopt generative AI.

Responsible AI

Foundation models are trained on vast amounts of data from the web, which means they can sometimes produce content that is inappropriate, biased, or toxic. It's crucial to have measures in place to define, measure, and manage these risks. New techniques like content filtering and watermarking are being developed to help, but it also requires a commitment to responsible use within your organisation.

Hallucinations

You may have heard of AI "hallucinations". This is when a model generates inaccurate information that isn't supported by its training data. It might invent facts or misremember details. This happens because of the way the models process information. Customising models with your own data and using specific, well-crafted prompts can help reduce these inaccuracies.

Costs and security

Training and running large AI models can be expensive. However, fine-tuning smaller, specialised models for specific use cases can be a much more cost-effective way to get accurate results at scale.

Security is another critical factor.

When you use your business data to customise a model, you need to ensure it remains private and secure. This should be a top priority at every stage of your AI project.

Working with a trusted cloud provider like AWS gives you access to a comprehensive set of security tools and services. These tools help you protect your data, meet compliance requirements, and give you peace of mind.

Securing your data properly means you can innovate with confidence, knowing your information is safe.

A plan for success in 2026

To make generative AI work for your business, you need a clear plan.

1. **Start with a data-first approach:** Your organisation's data is your biggest asset. Use it to customise foundation models and build experiences that are unique to your business. AWS provides the tools to securely connect your data and use it to your advantage.
2. **Choose the right tools:** You don't need to be locked into a single model. AWS gives you the flexibility to choose from a range of leading foundation models and the infrastructure to run them efficiently. This allows you to pick the best model for the job.
3. **Build and scale securely:** Begin with security and privacy in mind. Establish clear guidelines for responsible AI use and leverage the enterprise-grade security features offered by your cloud platform to protect your intellectual property.

Generative AI is no longer just an experiment.

By 2026, it will be a core part of how successful businesses operate.

With a thoughtful strategy focused on customisation, security, and responsible use, you can harness its power to drive real growth and innovation.

Let's build your AWS practice together

No matter where you are on your cloud journey, we are here to help you succeed with AWS.

Get in touch