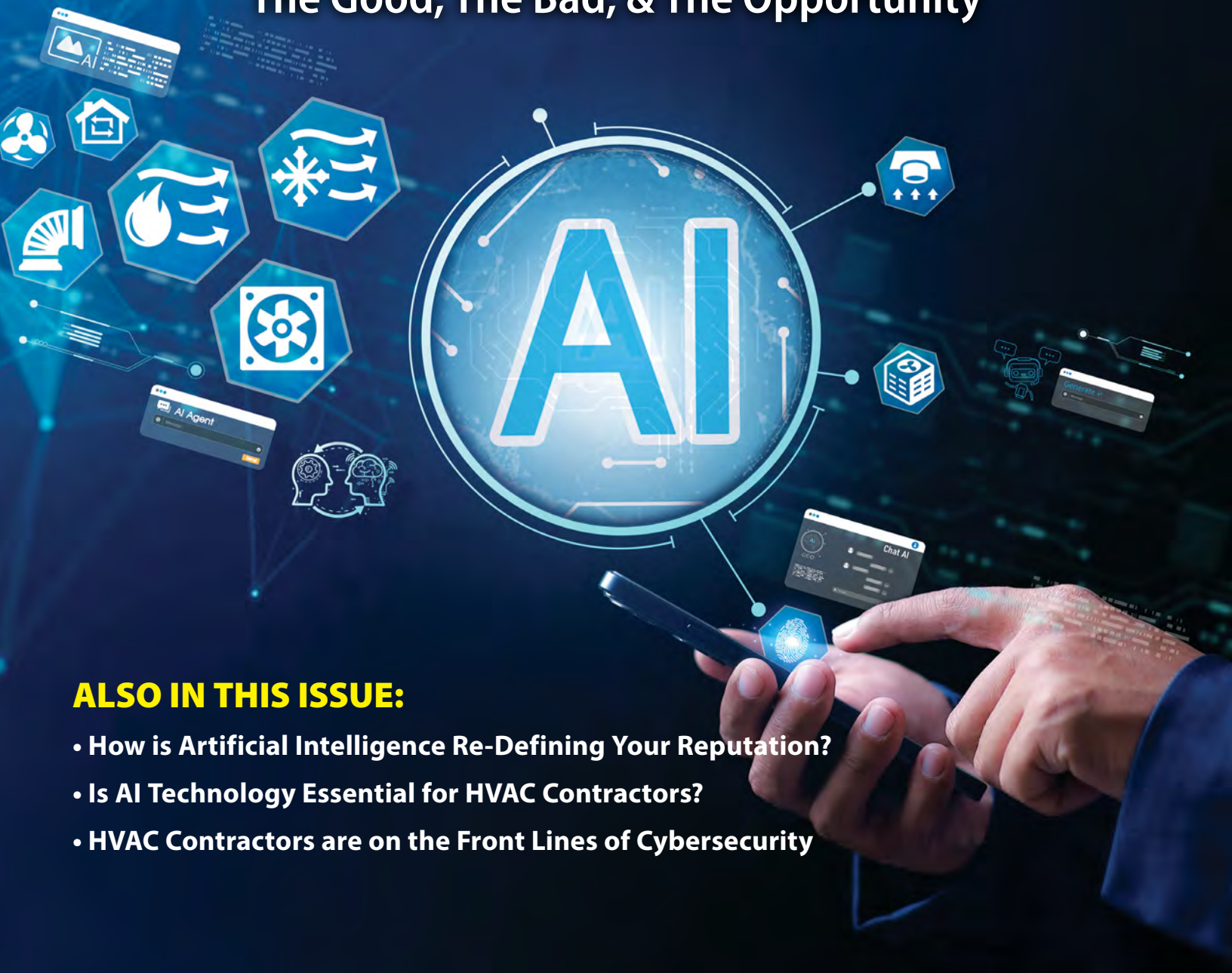


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If You Don't Measure, You're Just Guessing!™

AI In HVAC Contracting

The Good, The Bad, & The Opportunity



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- How is Artificial Intelligence Re-Defining Your Reputation?
- Is AI Technology Essential for HVAC Contractors?
- HVAC Contractors are on the Front Lines of Cybersecurity

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MANAGEMENT:

How AI is Redefining YOUR Marketplace Reputation

Guess what: AI has changed how customers find and choose contractors, and it has exposed a hard truth. Mike Montano of ReviewBuzz shares what he's discovered and what you can do about it.



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TECHNOLOGY:

Is Artificial Intelligence Essential for HVAC Contractors?

Guest writer Tomas Gorny discusses how the future belongs to the connected contractor who unifies operations using AI to deliver memorable customer experiences.

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MANAGEMENT:

HVAC Contractors Are on the Front Lines of Cybersecurity

The truth is that HVAC contractors are prime targets. Editor-in-Chief Mike Weil explains why and shares how to protect yourself and your clients.



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Evolve With the Industry or Risk Getting Left Behind



Mike Weil is editor-in-chief and director of communications and publications at National Comfort Institute, Inc. Contact him at ncilink.com/ContactMe.

If you have been in this trade for any length of time, you have heard it before: the industry is changing.

What we are experiencing right now goes beyond change. It is a full-scale evolution. The rules are shifting technically, operationally, and even philosophically. The contractors who recognize that shift early are the ones gaining ground. The rest may be feeling the gap.

ELECTRIFICATION CONTINUES RESHAPING THE CONVERSATION

Cold-weather, high-efficiency heat pumps are no longer a future talking point. They are gaining traction in real markets. This shift is being driven by incentives, regulations, and a growing awareness among homeowners. These systems require a deeper understanding of airflow, load calculations, and system design.

And now, we are beginning to see some push-back. State and local governments nationwide, to push electrification, have started adopting laws focused on reducing or eliminating fossil fuel use.

Recently, the [U.S. Department of Justice has filed lawsuits](#) against several cities that passed ordinances banning fossil fuel use in certain new construction projects.

This may cause a lot of confusion. However, in my humble opinion, high-performance contractors should still be prepared to properly install and service newer cold-weather heat pump systems, no matter the regulations.

REFRIGERANTS CREATING A NEW KNOWLEDGE GAP

The transition to low-GWP refrigerants continues moving quickly. There are new safety considerations, new tools, and new installation practices.



The contractor who can clearly explain what is changing, and why it matters, will win customer trust and the job.

FROM BOX-SWAPPING TO MEASURED PERFORMANCE

I've said this before and it bears repeating: Equipment alone does not answer consumer questions about efficiency, comfort, and safety.

That is why High-Performance HVAC™ contracting continues to gain momentum. Testing, measuring, and verifying results are impacting the conversation. As National Comfort Institute's (NCI) David Richardson says, "It's time to stop selling equipment and start delivering outcomes."

TECHNOLOGY IS RAISING EXPECTATIONS

Smart thermostats were just the beginning. Connected systems, remote diagnostics, and predictive maintenance are more common. Oh yeah, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is also part of that conversation. AI is raising the bar for what customers expect from their systems and from the professionals who install them.

Contractors who understand and embrace these tools will strengthen their position. Those who ignore them risk becoming irrelevant. **NCI**

This article continues online at
ncilink.com/TW0526

Written by HVAC Professionals for HVAC Professionals

ComfortMaxx™ Workflows in measureQuick®

Last summer I spent a few weeks testing the new **ComfortMaxx™** cooling workflow project in the **measureQuick®** app. There's a slight learning curve since this workflow uses a capture hood and follows a new process for measureQuick users. ComfortMaxx allows technicians



to quickly generate a report that grades the HVAC equipment and the duct system. This data provides guidance on where there may be system deficiencies.

ComfortMaxx relies on four primary measurements: equipment airflow,

delivered airflow, equipment Btus, and delivered Btus.

In the past, calculating these values by hand took a significant amount of time in the field. Once familiar with the workflow however, these measurements can be captured almost instantly. The only hurdle is the upfront investment for new tools.

Necessary tools include:

- Capture hood
- Single or dual port manometer (preferably smart manometers), or Digital TrueFlow® grid
- Minimum of four Bluetooth psychrometers (but preferably eight or more for higher accuracy).

During my first use, testing a single-story, 1,500-square-foot home took less than an hour and a half. After gaining

experience, I was able to complete projects much more efficiently. One stand-out feature is the automatically generated PDF report that gives customers a visual representation of their system's performance.

If you have these tools available, I recommend trying ComfortMaxx in measureQuick because it effectively grades your customers' duct system and equipment, while diagnosing pesky comfort issues.

If you are a measureQuick user and NCI member, learn how to connect ComfortMaxx here: ncilink.com/mq2CM. **NCI**

— By Adam Mufich, NCI Instructor



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How Is AI Redefining Reputation for High Performance HVAC™ Contractors?

The biggest missed opportunity in your business isn't the jobs you didn't win — it's the ones you already did. Every day, HVAC contractors solve real problems.

Comfort is restored. Systems perform the way they should. Homeowners feel the difference.

And then those moments disappear.

In today's market, if that experience isn't visible online, it might as well not exist. Artificial intelligence has changed how customers find and choose contractors, and it has exposed a hard truth:

Doing great work is no longer enough. If customers aren't documenting that work for you, AI won't see it — and neither will the market.

YOU'RE SITTING ON A DIAMOND MINE

There's an old business parable about a farmer who sold his land to search for diamonds elsewhere, only to discover later that the land he left behind became one of the richest diamond mines ever found.

That same mistake is happening in the HVAC industry. Contractors chase new leads, new platforms, and new marketing strategies while sitting on their most valuable asset: satisfied customers.

- Every completed job is a chance to capture proof
- Every solved comfort problem builds credibility
- Every happy homeowner is evidence of the work you already do well.

But if that proof isn't captured and shared, it doesn't contribute to your reputation — or your growth.

The issue isn't performance. It's visibility.

REPUTATION IS AN OPERATIONS ISSUE, NOT A SOFTWARE ISSUE

One big mistake contractors make is treating reputation management as a software problem. They invest in platforms and automation, hoping technology will generate reviews for them.

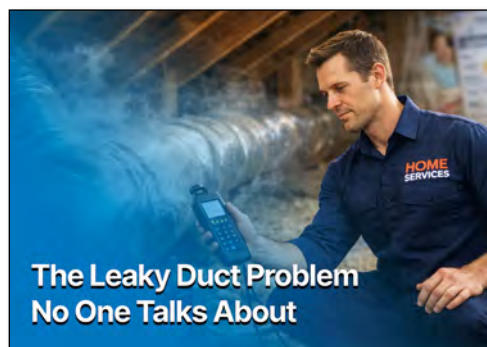
It won't. Software doesn't create reviews. People do.

Your technicians are the ones creating the experience. They communicate with homeowners, solve problems, educate customers, and leave a lasting impression.

Reviews are simply the byproduct of those moments. That makes reputation an operational function, not a marketing one.

High Performance HVAC™ contractors already understand this concept. You don't rely on tools alone to deliver system performance. You rely on trained people following a consistent process — measuring, testing, and verifying results.

Reputation deserves the same approach. Technology can support the process, but it can't replace it.



THE LEAKY DUCT PROBLEM NOBODY TALKS ABOUT

Imagine installing a perfectly designed high-performance system but connecting it to leaky ductwork. You'd never accept that, because you know what happens. Performance degrades. Efficiency suffers. Comfort problems show up later.



That's exactly what happens when you deliver great service but fail to capture the proof.

You're already doing the hard work — diagnosing systems, correcting airflow, improving performance, and solving problems. But when you don't consistently capture customer feedback, that value leaks out of your business.

You're **not** losing because you're not good. You're losing because you're **not visible**.

FROM SEARCH RESULTS TO AI RECOMMENDATIONS

Not long ago, the customer journey was simple.

- A homeowner had a problem
- They searched Google
- They compared contractors
- They made a choice.

That's no longer how search works.

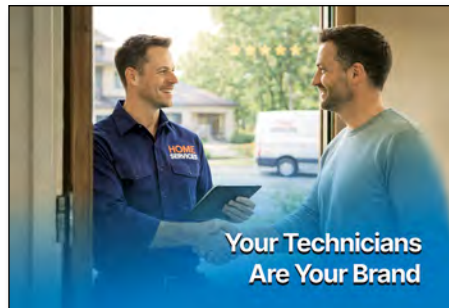
Today, it's about being recommended as the answer to customer problems. Google isn't just listing options

anymore. It's telling customers who to call.

Those recommendations aren't random. They're driven by trust signals — especially reviews.

- No reviews = no visibility
- No visibility = no recommendations
- No recommendations = no calls.

In an AI driven marketplace, your reputation determines whether you're even considered.



YOUR TECHNICIANS ARE YOUR PRODUCT

This is where reputation becomes personal. In an AI-driven world, reputation isn't just about your company

— it's about your people.

Every technician represents your brand in the customer's home. How they communicate, how they educate, and how they leave the customer feeling is what gets documented, shared, and evaluated.

The contractors who win understand a simple truth:

Your people are your product.

You can have the best equipment, processes, and systems in the industry. But if your technicians aren't creating great experiences, your reputation will never reflect the true quality of your work.

AI doesn't respond to slogans or claims. It responds to patterns — and authenticity.

YOU CAN'T FAKE AUTHENTICITY

There was a time when SEO meant chasing keywords and rankings. That era is over. Search has shifted from ranking to recommendation.

Google doesn't guess who to recommend. It looks for proof — consistent, recent proof — in the form of customer reviews.

- More reviews per job create more trust
- More trust earns your company more recommendations
- More recommendations lead to more calls.

Customers and AI are both validating patterns. They're looking for consistency and credibility, not clever marketing. You can't just rank anymore. You must be chosen.

TURNING WORK INTO TRUST

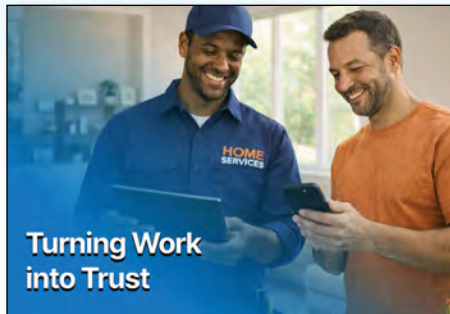
I often talk about turning great work into trust. Every job you complete is an opportunity to build trust — not just to fix a system, but to also document the experience you delivered.



High-Performance HVAC contractors already produce data: static pressure readings, airflow measurements, and system performance metrics. That's proof the system worked.

But system performance data alone doesn't build trust. The missing piece is the customer's voice.

When you combine measured results with customer validation, something changes. You're no longer telling homeowners you're different — you're



showing them.

- Data proves performance
- Reviews prove the experience mattered to the customers
- Together, they build trust your competitors can't easily duplicate.

WHY MOST CONTRACTORS STRUGGLE WITH REVIEWS

Most contractors today know reviews matter. Many set up automated emails and text systems. The results are often underwhelming.

Why? **Because automation misses the human moment.**

A generic follow up message hours or days after a job doesn't capture emotion. Most automated systems generate review rates in the single digits.

But when technicians ask at the right moment —

when the customer is genuinely happy — response rates can jump to 40% or even 50%.

That's not a technological gap. It's a process gap.

THE POWER OF THE MOMENT

Every successful job has a moment when everything clicks.

- The system is working
- The home feels better
- The problem is solved.

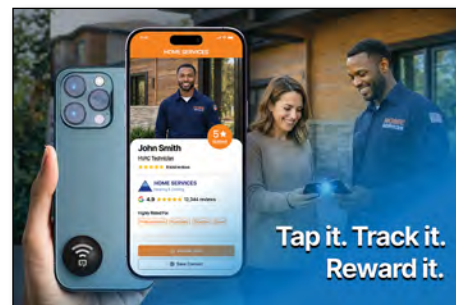
That's the moment to ask for feedback. Not later. Not in an automated email. Right there. Technicians don't need to be pushy. They just need to be present.

A simple, genuine request — paired with an easy way to respond — makes all the difference.

You're not asking for a favor. You're allowing the customer to share a great experience.

MODERNIZING THE BRAG BOOK

Years ago, contractors carried binders filled with testimonials — the old "brag book." It worked because it showed proof.



That concept still works today — it just looks different.

The modern brag book is digital, dynamic, and constantly updated. It's built from real time reviews, technician specific feedback, and documented customer experiences.

When you combine that with system performance data and real job examples, you shift the entire sales conversation. You're no longer selling promises. You're showing results.

When customers see proof, price becomes less of a barrier.

LEADERSHIP DRIVES REPUTATION

If reputation is an operational function, it needs operational leadership.

It's not something you hand off to marketing or hope software handles.

Service managers should own this process. They train technicians, set expectations, and create accountability. The best contractors follow a simple framework:

Tap it. Track it. Reward it.

- Train technicians to ask at the right moment
- Track results to see what's working
- Reward the behavior that you want repeated.

It's not complicated — but it does require consistency.

MEASURE THE EXPERIENCE LIKE YOU MEASURE THE SYSTEM

Again, high-performance contractors don't guess — they measure. So why wouldn't you measure customer experience?

Tools like **Net Promoter Score (NPS)** provide a clear, consistent way to understand how customers feel about your service.



Reviews alone don't tell the full story. Some satisfied customers never leave one. Some problems never surface publicly.

If you're not measuring experience, you're missing insight — and opportunities to improve.

WHERE TO FOCUS YOUR EFFORTS

You don't need to be everywhere.



You need to be strong where it matters.

- **Google** remains the dominant platform for search and AI recommendations
- **Facebook** provides social proof and visibility
- **Yelp** still plays a role, especially in the Apple ecosystem.

Be intentional. Focus your effort where trust is built and decisions are made.

THE CONTRACTORS WHO WILL WIN

The contractors who succeed in this environment won't necessarily have the biggest marketing budgets. They'll be the ones who connect performance, experience, and proof.

- They'll measure what matters
- They'll train their teams
- They'll capture the moments that define great service.

Because reputation isn't something you say. It's something your customers prove.

If you're already delivering high-performance work, you're closer than you think.

Now it's about making sure the world — and the AI helping customers decide — can see it.

In the end, the companies that win won't just be the best at what they do. They'll be the best at proving it. **NCI**



Mike Montano is the founder and CEO of **ReviewBuzz**, a reputation management platform for home service businesses. A former HVAC and plumbing contractor, he built his success by leveraging customer reviews to drive credibility and growth. Montano is a recognized authority on online reputation and customer advocacy, and author of **Stop Marketing. Be Remarkable!**, helping contractors turn employee performance into powerful, review-driven marketing. He is also the author of **Remarkable: How Great Technicians Turn Trust into Reviews and More Sales**, a playbook for turning everyday service into a steady stream of 5-star reviews and higher closing rates. If you'd like a free advanced copy of the book in PDF or Audible format, you can request it here: ncilink.com/ContactMe.

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The Science Behind Evacuation and Air

HVAC Educator **Ty Branaman** dives into the hidden pitfalls of pulling a deep vacuum and more importantly, how to avoid them. From moisture behavior to evacuation strategy, this episode gets into the details that separate the guesswork from actual results.


In this podcast, he talks with hosts **Adam Mufich** and **Casey Contreras** from NCI about how the properties of air can be confusing, and discusses that it is important to have a basic understanding when working in the HVAC field — from pulling vacuums to dealing with the different oils found in air handling units.

Ty makes this conversation fun and educational by breaking

complex topics down into relatable bite size pieces. He says the big secret is finding ways to make the invisible, visible.

He even shares some of the history of how you should properly pull a vacuum with a humorous “**Show me the science**” approach behind everything we do as professional HVAC contractors. And like all science, the best practice is to try different things to see what works best.

Ty even goes over the importance of understanding how a clothes dryer works and how it relates to HVAC and psychrometrics. If you are interested in watching this fun and educational podcast, just [click here](#).

Be sure to also check out our other podcasts below. 

Catch these and Other Episodes at HVACToday.com/Podcast



Modern HVAC Tools for Combustion and CO Safety

Adam Mufich and **Casey Contreras** of NCI, interview **Jason Esteves** of Seitron Americas to discuss combustion analyzers, personal CO monitors, as well as the latest refrigerant tools. Their conversation centers on real-world applications, safety, and accuracy in the field.

Economizers: More than Free Cooling

NCI's **Adam Mufich**, **Casey Contreras**, and **Jeff Sturgeon** discuss one of the most misunderstood equipment types out there: [economizers](#). They dig into installation challenges, discuss the health and cognitive benefits of proper ventilation, and then share how saved data reveals real system performance.

Cold Climate Heat Pumps and VRV Technology

In this episode, NCI's **Adam Mufich** and **Casey Contreras** interview **Chris Hughes** (The Energy Conservatory) and **Roman Baugh** (HVAC School) about cold-climate heat pumps and VRV systems. From charging to system-specific service tips, they break down what contractors need to get it right in the field.

Ultra-Low GWP Refrigerants: What Contractors Need to Know

David Richardson and **Adam Mufich** of NCI sit down with **Todd Titus** from HARDI to break down ultra-low GWP refrigerants, upcoming regulations, and the real-world trickle-down effects on contractors and consumers. They also dig into how HARDI is pushing back and advocating for the HVAC industry.

The Combustion Chronicles with Jim Davis: Combustion Efficiency

Adam Mufich and **David Richardson** from NCI interview **Jim Davis**, who will take you through the real-world experiences that led him to uncover what actually affects combustion efficiency. Along the way, Davis challenges common trade myths and simplifies the basics of heat transfer, showing how they play a critical role in combustion.

Listen or watch wherever you find your podcasts or visit HVACToday.com/Podcast



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 May 19-21: Lewisville, TX
 May 27-29: Phoenix, AZ
 June 2-4: Port Charlotte, FL
 June 9-11: Morristown, TN

Airflow Testing & Diagnostics

May 12: Morristown, TN
 May 27: Las Vegas, NV

Refrigerant-Side Performance

May 13-14: Morristown, TN

PUBLIC LIVE TRAINING (cont.)

Residential HVAC System Performance and Air Balancing

May 12-14: Maple Heights, OH
 June 2-4: Colorado Springs, CO

PUBLIC ONLINE LIVE TRAINING

Duct System Optimization ONLINE LIVE

Part 1: May 12-13 • Part 2: May 19-20

Airflow Testing & Diagnostics ONLINE LIVE

May 19-20

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June 2-3

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Duct System Optimization and Residential Air Balancing

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Residential HVAC System Performance Certification Program

June 2-3: Anaheim, CA

The High-Performance Approach to Heat Pump Retrofits

June 4: Anaheim, CA

Commercial Air Balancing

June 9-11: Anaheim, CA

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May 27: Burbank, CA

The High-Performance Approach to Heat Pump Retrofits

May 28: Burbank, CA



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Is AI Essential Technology for HVAC Contractors?

High-Performance HVAC™ contractors have long known the importance of addressing static pressure. But there's another kind of "static pressure" building up in the industry. This one doesn't affect airflow; it affects customer experience (CX). And poor customer experience can be damaging for your business.

In this era, CX is everything. It determines how people feel about your company, which determines your reviews and word-of-mouth reputation. The ability to deliver the best customer experiences is your biggest asset. And that asset is under threat.



THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

Customer expectations are higher than ever. They're boosted constantly by a world of instant gratification. People can click a button on their phones to have any food they want delivered in under an hour. Increasingly, they want similar results from other kinds of companies.

People no longer compare brands just to their competitors in the same industry. Now people

compare their experiences with your business to the best experiences they've ever had with any business. For HVAC organizations, like so many others, this means your success and even your company's survival, depends on providing the best, fastest CX.

You're also hearing from customers across more channels than ever – by phone, text, email, social media, and more. And here's the irony: Despite all that customer information coming in, you're likely to understand your customers even less.

I see this happening all the time. With so much data inundating you, it can seem impossible to keep track of it all. It's like the CX system is being flooded with too much information, and no ductwork for it to travel through.

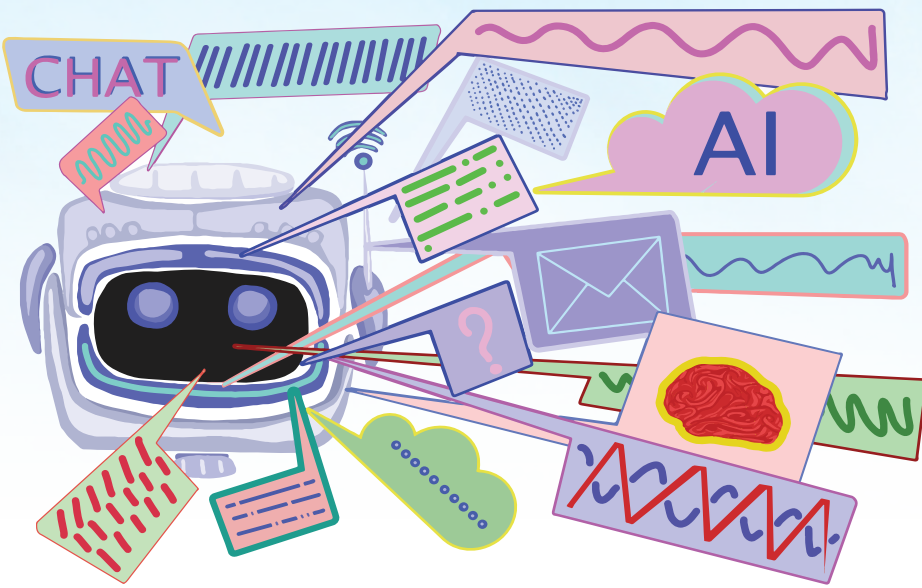
To combat this kind of "static pressure," high-performance contractors are beginning to turn to artificial intelligence (AI) for help. But simply introducing AI into your operations doesn't solve the problem. In fact, if you're not careful, it can make things worse.

Working with businesses across a number of industries, including utilities, I've found that it helps to explain the key elements to watch for when introducing AI into your company operations.

SEAMLESSNESS IS THE GOAL FOR AI

To achieve a seamless customer experience, step one is ending data silos. Currently, crucial information about each customer is spread out. There may be some in a dispatch app, a billing spreadsheet, a mess of text threads on technicians' personal phones, and more. Each one of these areas is a separate data silo.

[A study on transforming the customer experience](#) in the energy and utilities markets explained, "Significant data-related challenges



include inconsistent customer identifiers across systems, incomplete historical interaction records, and limited metadata describing the context of customer communications.”

The good news is that there’s a solution: a new, transformative technology: CX automation tools powered by generative AI.

UNIFICATION IS POWER

High-performance contractors need a single system to automatically pull together all customer data from across every touchpoint. Such a system can use AI to help understand and ingest all that data and provide contractors with key insights at a single glance.

Skimping on any part of this process can lead to failure. For example, an AI tool might summarize your texts, but if it doesn’t show what those same customers have said by phone (through transcriptions of calls) and email, it could lead you in the wrong direction.

A [Unified Customer Experience Management platform \(UCXM\)](#) pulls together every action into a single record. It goes beyond just “omni-channel communications,” which leaves out the most important part: unification.

Unifying customer information gives a contractor a “perfect memory.” When a homeowner calls about

a furnace blowing cold air, your team shouldn’t need to ask about the customer’s history, the type of system, or anything else that your company already knows.

Your team should instantly see all this, as well as how the customer felt

about previous experiences; whether the customer gave your technicians a five-star review; and more.

DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE FORTUNE 500 EXPERIENCE

The same study I mentioned earlier, published in the [Journal of Computer Science and Technology Studies](#), highlights the power of a unified customer data platform. In addition to establishing a “comprehensive data strategy,” it also increases cross-functional collaboration.

“While digital transformation requires significant investment, forward-thinking utilities recognize these

10 Benefits: The ROI of Unifying Customer Data

FOR THE CONTRACTOR: BUSINESS EXCELLENCE

- 1. Know your customer:** Get a holistic picture of your customer, with key insights at a single glance.
- 2. End busy work:** Free the experts to do the complex, specialized work they’re trained to do, rather than administrative tasks.
- 3. Know what you need:** A technician no longer arrives on scene only to discover that they have the wrong parts, because the customer record includes all that information.
- 4. Automated follow-ups:** AI handles follow-ups, like asking whether customers are satisfied while the results are fresh in mind. This keeps positive reviews plentiful.
- 5. Predictive marketing:** Since you know the customer and their situation, including how old their systems are, you know what to offer and when.

FOR THE CLIENT: CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

- 1. Feel known:** No need to repeat information or start from scratch. It’s the *Holy Grail* of the customer experience.
- 2. Instant bookings:** No need to wait on hold, hope for a call back, or wonder whether a tech has been assigned.
- 3. Faster resolution:** When the contractor comes fully prepared, the path to getting a problem fixed moves into the fast lane.
- 4. Understandable records:** AI-generated summaries explain complex repairs in plain English, making homeowners even more appreciative of the work, and more likely to give positive reviews.
- 5. No more spam:** Only hear from contractors with relevant offers that make sense for you.



expenditures as strategic rather than merely tactical,” the study says. “The value proposition encompasses multiple dimensions including operational efficiency, regulatory compliance, and enhanced customer relationships.

“Leading utilities are now prioritizing customer experience investments as part of their core business strategy rather than treating them as discretionary technology projects.”

None of this means it’s out-of-reach for smaller businesses. Ever since I moved to the United States from Poland with nothing to my name, I’ve seen that democratizing technology is the key to success.

That includes taking the latest technologies available to global giants and putting them in the hands of a 10-truck HVAC shop. For example, how about developing an AI receptionist that never misses a call, text, or chat.

This same assistant can automatically schedule service calls, assign technicians, and provide technicians with links to complete customer records so they know exactly what their tasks are.

BEWARE OF PITFALLS

While AI tools can revolutionize your operations, there are also potential dangers. Most importantly, privacy is paramount. Any tool you use should include the highest standards

of protection against accidental information leaks, as well as hacking.

Privacy can also be jeopardized another way: through “shadow AI.” [A report from MIT](#) found that only 40% of companies actually buy official subscriptions to AI tools that use large language models (LLMs).

Yet, employees in more than 90% of those companies regularly use personal AI tools for their work. This runs the risk that employees may share customer information with publicly available tools. To avoid this, businesses should use software that keeps customer information protected.

Furthermore, I suggest contractors should beware of “[AI washing](#),” in which vendors can fraudulently claim that their tools use AI technologies. Some are just slapping a new label on old, rigid technology.

To avoid this, stay away from “[black box](#)” scenarios, in which vendors don’t explain how their tools work. The vendor should be able to describe its functions in understandable ways. Also, have the vendor demonstrate the tool in various use cases.

For example, have the AI analyze a new text from a customer (received at 2 a.m.) for both information and sentiment. See whether it instantly combines all that with previous records by email and phone conversations,


updating the record so any agent gets a complete picture immediately.

MEANINGFUL WORK FOR HUMANS

Some people worry that the AI revolution will erase jobs and endanger livelihoods. I see things differently. Just like previous technological revolutions, this one can allow machinery to take over routine tasks and free up people who can then engage in more meaningful work.

Imagine that a caller reaches out to a contractor, and the AI assistant picks up. If the caller’s language, tone, or other cues indicate that it would be better for them to have a person on the line, the AI tool can instantly alert someone standing by.

This way, human agents can skip more of the busy work and calls for routine tasks so they can interact with customers in more meaningful ways. And, perhaps most importantly, technicians can focus on delivering the needed results.

High-Performance HVAC includes high-performance CX. The future belongs to the connected contractor that unifies its operations and delivers the best, most memorable customer experiences. 



Tomas Gorny is co-founder and CEO of [Nextiva](#). An award-winning entrepreneur, he is committed to helping set up businesses for success with powerful and intuitive technologies. He and his team work

with businesses across numerous industries, including HVAC and public utilities. Tomas is also a philanthropist, carrying out a range of projects through both Nextiva Cares and the Gorny Foundation. If you have questions, you can contact him here: ncilink.com/ContactMe.



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HVAC Contractors are on the Front Lines of Cybersecurity

We know that the world is changing all around us, and it is changing very quickly. From technology to regulations, from safety to comfort, from politics to society, the world continues to change at light speed.

In the last few years, I've been wondering whether this wild shift toward artificial intelligence (AI) in home and commercial control systems and robotics is the next "bubble" that will either burst or upend the world as we know it. Frankly, it already is upending the world.

Look inside any high-performance building today, and you'll see sophisticated HVAC systems working in concert with automation, analytics, and connected controls. But beneath the surface of this digital efficiency lies a growing threat: cyberattacks targeting the very systems designed to keep our buildings running. I wrote a bit about this last year in the article, "[A Look at Cybersecurity for HVAC Contractors.](#)"

Basically, today's High-Performance HVAC™ contractors are no longer just mechanical experts — they've become guardians of digital infrastructure. And from where I sit, the stakes have never been higher.

WHY HVAC CONTRACTORS ARE PRIME TARGETS

HVAC systems are deeply embedded in what is known as operational technology (OT)

networks. In case you don't know, according to several online resources, OT networks are systems that control and operate physical equipment such as HVAC systems, building controls, manufacturing machines, and other "real-world" devices.

Instead of handling data like IT networks do, OT networks:

- Monitor and control equipment
- Keep systems running safely and efficiently
- Connect sensors, controllers, and machines.

In an HVAC context, this includes things like:

- Building automation systems (BAS)
- Smart thermostats and controls
- Sensors for temperature, airflow, and pressure
- Remote monitoring systems.

OT networks are designed for reliability and

Why Cybersecurity Matters

- ➔ Most breaches begin with a phishing email
- ➔ HVAC/BMS networks are among the least protected OT systems
- ➔ Ransomware attacks have doubled industry wide
- ➔ Third-party contractor access is one of the top attack vectors
- ➔ Smart buildings can have thousands of connected points.



Cyber Hygiene Checklist for Technicians

- Update firmware before leaving a job
- Use unique credentials for every system
- Never connect personal devices to client networks
- Document security settings as carefully as equipment settings
- Report anything suspicious immediately.



uptime, not convenience. They often include older systems built without cybersecurity in mind and are increasingly connected to the internet.

According to a series of articles and blog posts on the [CyberUnit](#) website, the result is that, in HVAC and building systems, OT networks are a common entry point for cyberattacks. Attackers typically know that these systems are often:

- Overlooked from a security standpoint
- Connected to critical infrastructure
- Accessible through remote tools and cloud dashboards.

Add in the fact that contractors frequently hold system credentials, remote access permissions, and sensitive customer information. These facts are why the HVAC industry is becoming a perfect storm of opportunity for cybercriminals.

SMART BUILDINGS, SMARTER RISKS

Today's buildings are integrated ecosystems. This is true not only in commercial buildings but also in homes. Why? Because HVAC components communicate with:

- Building Management Systems (BMS)
- Energy platforms
- IoT (Internet of Things) sensors
- Cloud services
- Mobile control apps.

These attributes make them powerful — but also vulnerable. One weak password, one outdated controller, or one unsecured remote login can expose an entire facility.

“One outdated controller or one unsecured laptop can bring down an entire facility.”

THE CONTRACTOR'S EXPANDED ATTACK SURFACE

What does this mean? Today, there are five major avenues for hackers to break into your company and then springboard into your customers' buildings. These “attack surfaces” include the following:

1. Business Email Compromise: Most HVAC Contractors rely heavily on email for things like bids, invoices,

project approvals, payment confirmations, and more.

Attackers exploit this with increasingly sophisticated [phishing campaigns](#) to redirect payments or deploy [ransomware](#).

2. Remote Access Vulnerabilities: Remote access tools allow contractors to monitor, adjust, and service systems. But without strong controls, these tools can become digital backdoors, creating [remote access vulnerabilities](#).

3. Connected HVAC Systems: [Smart thermostats](#), Variable Refrigerant Flow (VRF) networks, and cloud connected controllers create convenience — and potential entry points for attackers who can shut down, alter, or hijack systems.

4. Third-Party Weak Links: Each software vendor, subcontractor, or integration partner potentially expands your risk footprint. For these reasons, it is so important to ensure that your third-party partners have buttoned-up security on their systems to protect yours.

5. Customer Exposure: Should a breach occur through contractor access, liability may extend far beyond

downtime — including reputational and legal consequences. Consider the [2013 data breach, which cost Target more than \\$18.5 million](#) in settlements and fees as a worst-case scenario.

HUMAN FACTORS: THE HIDDEN WEAKNESS

In our universe, HVAC service and installation technicians are often well-trained and skilled — but not always in cybersecurity. Under tight schedules, they may unintentionally:

- Click a malicious link
- Reuse or share passwords
- Skip firmware updates
- Connect unsafe devices to networks.

Cybercriminals count on this. That's why [continuous training](#) isn't optional — it's essential.

RISK DIRECTED SECURITY: THE MODERN APPROACH

In an article published by the [Forbes Technology Council in February 2026](#), author Rich Hutchinson says that traditional checklist based security no longer works.

He writes, “As environments grow more complex and AI accelerates both business and adversary tactics, static controls and snapshot risk assessments fall behind reality.

“Instead of governing cybersecurity by tool inventories and periodic assessments, organizations must treat cyber risk as a continuously measured business variable — one that leadership can track, prioritize, and manage in real time.

“This approach, called **risk-directed security**, is imperative in 2026 as resilience is defined not by the number of controls deployed

but by how effectively risk is understood, prioritized, and reduced as conditions change.

Hutchinson says that risk directed security focuses on:

- ◆ **Real time visibility**
- ◆ **Prioritized threats**
- ◆ **Continuous monitoring**
- ◆ **Outcome-driven decisions.**

For HVAC contractors, this means shifting from “install and maintain” to “protect and manage.”

This mindset elevates you from service provider to trusted partner.



PRACTICAL STEPS TO PROTECT CLIENTS AND YOURSELF

There is no doubt that cybersecurity can feel overwhelming for HVAC contractors whose overriding concern is keeping customers comfortable, especially during the busy summer season. According to an article written by Lliam Holms last year in the [MIS Solutions Blog](#), here are eight practical and easy steps you can take to protect customers and yourselves:

Secure Email & Identity First: This is your biggest vulnerability — and your easiest win. Do these things:

- [Enable multifactor authentication](#) (MFA)
- Use [strong, unique passwords](#)
- Implement [phishing training](#)
- Add [email filtering and login](#)

[monitoring.](#)

Harden Remote Access: Treat remote entry points like the front door of a bank. How? Follow these rules:

- Remove default logins
- Require MFA
- Enforce [least privilege access](#)
- Record and monitor sessions
- [Disable unused access paths.](#)

Segment Networks: Never mix HVAC systems with enterprise IT networks. Network segmentation limits how far attackers can move if they do gain access.

Keep Systems Updated: Track and manage all of the following:

- ◆ Firmware
- ◆ Software versions
- ◆ End of life hardware
- ◆ Patch cycles.

Keeping systems up to date eliminates known vulnerabilities before attackers can exploit them.

Improve Credential Management: Enforce policies that include:

- Password managers
- Role-based access
- Credential rotation
- Unique logins for each technician.

Train Your Team Continually: Every High-Performance HVAC contractor understands the importance of ongoing training and education. Workforce awareness of cybersecurity

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concerns falls into the same category. Training is a critical layer of defense. Here are some ideas on what cyber training may include:

- **Social engineering**
- **Phishing red flags**
- **Safe device usage**
- Proper **remote access** practices.
- **Establish an Incident Response Plan:** This plan helps you to know exactly what to do when — not if — something goes wrong. Include:
 - Communication protocols
 - Isolation procedures
 - Recovery steps
 - Client notification guidelines.

Add Cyber Liability Insurance: I know more insurance is the last thing you want to think about, but you should consider, according to *Forbes* magazine, that **cyber liability insurance** provides a financial safety net for:

- Ransomware
- Data exposure
- Business interruption
- Legal support.

Insurance doesn't replace good security — but it supports recovery when needed most.

**CLIENT COMMUNICATION:
YOUR NEW VALUE PROPOSITION**

High-Performance HVAC contractors thrive on trust. You already advise on IAQ, energy efficiency, and mechanical reliability — now cybersecurity joins that list. You should be educating clients about:

1. The risks of connected equipment
2. The importance of updates and segmentation
3. Best practices for access control
4. Their role in supporting secure buildings.


When you speak confidently about cybersecurity, clients see you as more than a service vendor — they see you as a partner.

**CYBERSECURITY IS BECOMING
A CORE COMPETENCY**

The message is clear: ***If you work in High-Performance HVAC, you work in cybersecurity.*** Again, some reasons for this include:

- You operate inside the digital nervous system of the modern building
- You manage access to essential systems
- You influence safety, uptime, energy performance, and now — cyber resilience.

I believe that becoming a cybersecurity aware contractor isn't optional. Frankly, it's the new baseline for excellence. It applies to both your residential and commercial customers. They may not know it, but they depend on you being cybersecurity aware. Your reputation depends on it. And your business's future depends on it.

The good news: High-Performance HVAC contractors sit in the catbird's seat. You already have the culture and tools to take the lead. Those who embrace this responsibility will be in the forefront of the next era of high performance building service. 



Mike Weil is the editor-in-chief of **High-Performance HVAC Today** magazine as well as the director of communications for **National Comfort Institute (NCI)**. He has been with NCI since 2014 and is a former

chief editor for *Contracting Business* magazine. For article writing opportunities, reach out to him at ncilink.com/ContactMe.

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CHECK OUT THE SUMMIT 2026 PROGRAM!

The **High-Performance HVAC™ Summit 2026** is only a few months away – are you ready? This year, we are hosting the event in Pigeon Forge, TN, at the **HeartSong Lodge & Resort** from **September 1-3, 2026**.

Summit offers contractors an energizing mix of training, collaboration, and industry innovation. This year, we feature 15 breakout sessions covering a variety of topics focused on **Culture: The Heart of High-Performance HVAC™**.

We've broken these sessions into three main tracks:

- Business and Career Development
- Sales
- Technical.

Business and Career Development:

The following are just some of the sessions and speakers under this track.

- **High-Performance HVAC Begins with Leadership** — Led by Anthony Woo, Quebec, Canada
- **How to Change Culture and Build a High-Performance Team** — Presented by Ken Beasley, Kathleen, GA
- **Be the Torchbearer: Lead Your Organization to High-Performance HVAC** — John Ellis, Las Vegas, NM

Sales: A couple of these important sessions include the following:

- **The High-Performance HVAC™ Sales Process – Ask Us Anything!** Co-presented by Dominick Guarino & David Richardson, Morristown, TN.
- **Become a Home Performance Whisperer** — Led by John Esquivel, Austin, TX.

Technical: This sampling of sessions is the meat and potatoes of National Comfort Institute's approach to High-Performance HVAC Contracting.

- **High-Performance Heat Pumps: Reverse Cycle: Putting the Questions First** — Co-presented by Ty Branaman, Clermont, FL, and Adam Mufich, Morristown, TN
- **Real IAQ Solutions for HVAC Contractors** — Led by Tim DeStasio, Southport, NC
- **The ABC's (and D) of Refrigerant-Side Performance** — Co-presented by Luke Peterson, Louisville, KY, and Casey Contreras, Morristown, TN
- **Why Test Out? Don't Just Promise Performance, Prove It!** — Jayme Cardin, Costa Mesa, CA
- **NCI, measureQuick®, and The Energy Conservatory; Test-a-Thon!** — Co-presented by Jim Bergmann, Mogadore, OH; Chris Hughes, Oakdale, MN; and David Richardson, Morristown, TN.

Be sure to go online for more details on **ALL** the speakers and sessions. Go to ncilink.com/2026Breakouts.



For more information, contact the NCI Customer Care line at **800-633-7058**.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

We're excited to announce the latest

additions to THE community of forward-thinking professionals who share a commitment to doing more than just installing and servicing equipment — they want to deliver proven performance, measurable results, and exceptional customer experiences.



Please join us in welcoming the next generation of NCI members:

- Allen Norris HVAC — Cumming, GA
- Balancing Technologies Inc. — Pepperell, MA
- Benton's Maintenance & Mechanical Inc. — Columbus, MS
- Castle Comfort LLC — Olathe, CO
- Davinci Mechanical — Orange, CA
- Eric Kjelshus Energy Heating and Cooling — Greenwood, MO
- Home Energy Medics — Arlington, VA
- Jackson Services — LaGrange, GA
- Lloyd Plumbing, Heating, Air, and Electrical — Montpelier, VT
- Mr. Dirty Ducts — Manchester, TN
- Parkers City Wide Heating & Air — Sacramento, CA
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- Quantum Heating & Air Conditioning Inc. — Corona, CA
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Artificial Intelligence:

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly



Dominick Guarino
is publisher of
*High-Performance
HVAC Today* magazine
and CEO of National
Comfort Institute, Inc.
He can be reached at
[ncilink.com/
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Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be a powerful tool when used correctly and judiciously. There are many books and articles written about the subject, some good ones right here in the pages of this month's issue!

Let's take a look at some AI applications that can benefit your business. We'll also look at how to keep your AI use from going off the rails.

THE GOOD

There is much good that can come from using AI in your business. On your operations side it can help you organize and improve anything from your business plan, to your marketing and advertising, to performance reviews, and so much more.

Start by either writing or audio-recording your thoughts and ideas. Next put them through an AI engine like [ChatGPT](#), [Gemini](#), or [CoPilot](#). The software then outputs clear, concise outlines with details that puts them in logical, sequential documents.

This technology can also work with your service management system to help organize your processes and procedures that can then be accessed on your field technicians' devices. There is already great software out there that does just that. This can be a powerful way to ensure consistency and quality throughout your company.

AI can be also used as an important part of dispatching. Imagine your software tied to an AI engine with key data about your service techs.

This data might include where they live, what certifications and tools they have, what they are really good at, and what they are still in the process of learning.

Now imagine your AI-enhanced system planning your daily service schedule, or helping you make changes at any point in time. In seconds it

could inform your dispatcher exactly which technician to send based on location, availability, tools, and strengths and weaknesses.

There are many other ways AI can help your business, but unfortunately I only have so much room on this page to write about them!

THE BAD

One of the worst things you can do is rely blindly on what AI produces. It can get things slightly, or very wrong, so the output should **always** be reviewed and edited before finalizing it.


As much as AI can be a huge timesaver, if left unchecked it can produce bad, even damaging information. In other words, don't abdicate your decisions and responsibilities to it. Use it instead to make your work easier, then refine the output to match your intent.

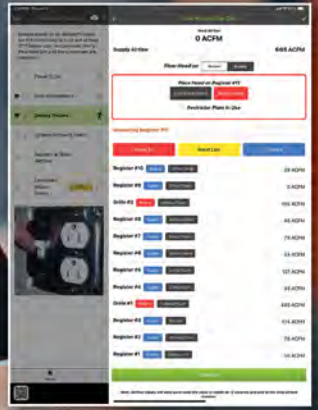
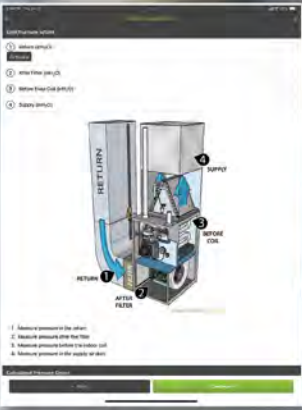
THE UGLY

When it comes to internet-based content like websites, social media posts, blogs, etc. AI can give you a great starting point.

Caution: Many internet bots are AI-based. These bots instantly recognize work created by AI, and usually dismiss pages, videos, photos, posts, and blogs as written by AI, plagiarized, or fake. This means a site or post rankings created by AI can be dropped to almost invisible.

How do you combat this? Use AI to organize your ideas, then edit the output to reflect your original thinking and personality. This applies as much to words as to graphics and videos.

There are many applications for this amazing technology. The key is to be aware of its limitations and avoid unintentional consequences. When you accompany Artificial Intelligence with Actual Intelligence (Also AI- lol) you can do amazing things for your business! 



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Be sure to mark your calendars for September 1-3, 2026, in Pigeon Forge, TN.

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