

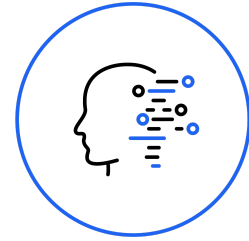


OpenAI's 2025 Small Business Jam

An After-Action Report on Success Stories,
Skill-Building, and Lessons Learned

December 2025

OpenAI



Foreword

At OpenAI, we're building tools to help people solve hard problems. That includes the small businesses that form the backbone of our economy and the heart of our communities. Small business owners are often the first to take risks, create jobs, and serve real needs on Main Street — and have the most to benefit from time-saving AI tools. At a moment when rising costs, tighter margins, and stronger competition from larger firms are squeezing small business owners from every direction, access to powerful new tools has never mattered more. Our OpenAI Academy Small Business Jam was designed to meet that moment by putting AI directly in owners' hands and spending a day learning, building, and problem-solving together.

We believe in democratizing innovation so the benefits of AI reach as many people as possible, not just a select few. On November 20, we partnered with DoorDash, SCORE, and local business-support organizations to bring small business owners together at five locations across the country — Detroit, Houston, Miami, New York City, and San Francisco — for a hands-on day of learning practical ways to build with AI. In San Francisco, we met owners who had never used AI before that morning and were already applying it to real business problems by that afternoon.

This Small Business Jam builds directly on the momentum of our earlier Nonprofit Jam, which brought together nearly 1,000 nonprofit leaders across 10 sites nationwide to learn practical ways to build with AI. That experience showed how quickly mission-driven organizations could put these tools to work when learning is hands-on and tied to real needs, and helped inform how we designed this Jam specifically for entrepreneurs operating at the speed of commerce.

The events were part of our growing OpenAI Academy, a free online learning platform that has already helped 2.5 million people connect with the resources, workshops, and communities they need to master AI tools.

Across all five sites, small business owners worked directly with OpenAI technical experts and volunteers to explore how ChatGPT can support strategic planning, marketing, visual design, customer outreach, website creation, and day-to-day operations. Many participants have fewer than five employees, and some were true “solopreneurs,” using ChatGPT as their only co-worker. Nearly all were navigating the daily reality of doing more with less. Just as important as the training itself, we listened and learned from the entrepreneurs so we can continue building tools that meet the real needs of Main Street.

A central goal of the Jam was access: reaching owners who typically don't have the time, technical expertise, or resources to experiment with emerging technologies. Family-run restaurants, small contractors, neighborhood retailers, and first-time founders all brought different challenges into the room, and left with practical, immediately usable skills. That exchange — between builders of AI and builders of businesses — is what made the day meaningful.

And to expand the access beyond this one day of learning, we extended the impact of the Jam with a follow-up virtual session on December 4, and will host a second virtual session on January 15, allowing even more entrepreneurs to build skills and deepen what they learned in person.

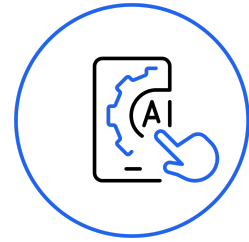
This report (1) summarizes what happened at the Small Business Jam; (2) details what participants said about the event; (3) highlights successes with owners who had never used AI before, as well as with the “solopreneurs” who use ChatGPT as their only co-worker; (4) evaluates the workflows participants found most valuable; (5) and shares OpenAI's takeaways on expanding responsible AI adoption for small businesses.

We want to thank our partners at DoorDash, SCORE, and the local organizations that helped convene business owners in each city, as well as the OpenAI employees who volunteered their time and expertise to make these sessions possible. Most of all, we thank the entrepreneurs who showed up ready to learn, experiment, and push themselves to build something better for their businesses and their communities.

Our goal is not just that owners leave with new tools but that, months from now, they are saving time, reaching new customers, growing revenue, and in some cases hiring their next employee because AI helped unlock capacity they didn't have before.

The Small Business Jam reflects our continued commitment to making the benefits of AI accessible to everyone — not just large companies with big budgets, but the small businesses that keep our neighborhoods, towns, and cities thriving.

OpenAI Global Affairs



Tips, instruction, and a prompt pack: What happened at the Jam

On November 20, OpenAI partnered with DoorDash, SCORE, and 16 regional business-support organizations to host over 500 small business owners at five different sites across the country: Detroit, Houston, Miami, New York City, and San Francisco.

At each location, small business owners experimented and learned alongside peers and leaders from across their communities. They received instructions and tips from on-site OpenAI volunteers on how to use AI tools to help solve real problems they face day to day running their businesses. And then they put that instruction into practice, creating a working prototype or workflow that they were able to apply to their business that very day. Business owners across multiple industries attended sessions at the five sites, offering support and best practices to their fellow Main Street businesses.

When the sessions began, the business owners received access to a [Small Business Prompt Pack](#) – developed by our Go To Market team and in collaboration with our partners from DoorDash – with prompts designed to deliver clear, practical outputs. Leading up to Jam Day, business owners had the opportunity to ramp up their learning with ChatGPT [101](#) and [102](#) for small businesses. Jam Day, and the supporting content, was built for “Main Street” businesses with roughly 1–100 employees, including restaurants, retail, service providers, and online sellers who want to save time, reach more customers, and grow with AI.

“Running a small business is equal parts craft, creativity, and chaos” says Elizabeth Jarvis-Shean, DoorDash’s Chief Corporate Affairs Officer. “AI can’t make that easy, but it can and should make it easier. Whether it’s writing a menu description, managing inventory, or planning for the dinner rush, DoorDash wants to make sure small business owners of all kinds have what they need to succeed as technology continues to accelerate. We’re thrilled to team up with OpenAI, SCORE, and our regional partners across the country to ensure they have a little more time to focus on what makes their business special.”

OpenAI is proud to have co-created and led this initiative with DoorDash, a partner who intimately understands business owners’ needs and challenges.



By the Numbers



530

**Small business
owners**



18

**Small Business
Jam partners**



134

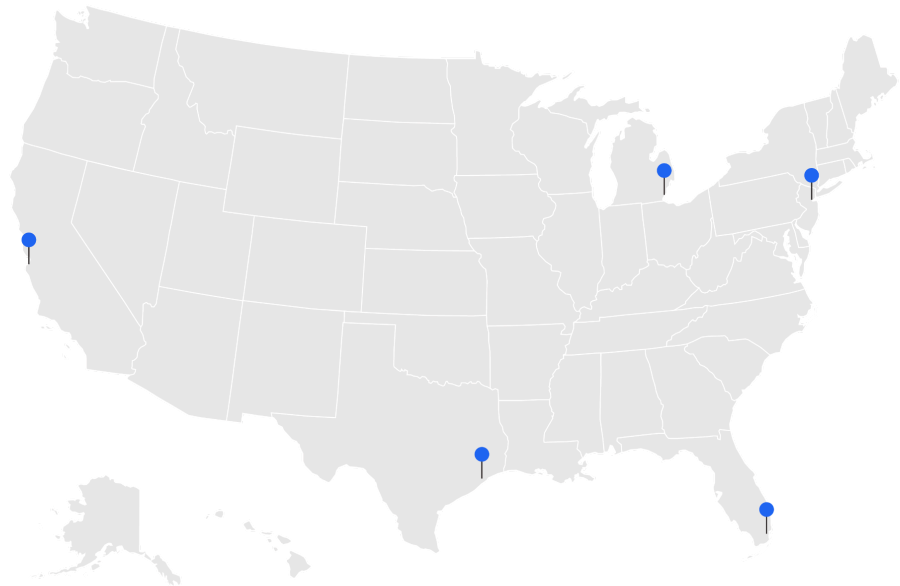
**OpenAI
volunteers**

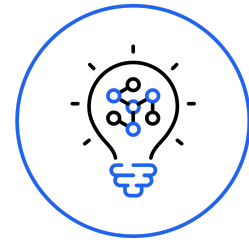


5

Locations:

Detroit, MI
Houston, TX
Miami, FL
New York City, NY
San Francisco, CA





“This changed the game for me”: What participants said

According to a survey taken after the Small Business Jam, 85% of participants said it was very or extremely valuable; 78% said they left with a functional workflow; 92% said they were definitely going to apply what they learned in the next 30 days; and 96% said they’d recommend the Jam to other small business owners.

What Participants Said



85%

said the Jam was very or extremely valuable



96%

would recommend it to other small business owners



78%

said they left the Jam Day with a functional workflow



92%

“definitely” plan to use what they learned in the next 30 days

Participants also reported that AI is already helping their business, especially by saving time on routine tasks and solving problems faster:

“Thank you SO much - it was a day full of learning and putting into practice!”

“This experience was genuinely transformative.”

“Thank you for the support you provided on this day! It was very helpful and informative.”

“This changed the game for me with AI usage.”

“The resources that are available on OpenAI Academy are awesome.”

“The content was highly valuable”

“The mentorship team was excellent—very engaged, knowledgeable, and willing to guide us hands-on.”

“This was a phenomenal practical learning session. Thank you!!”

“10/10 recommend!”



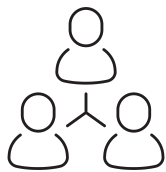
“This was the single most impactful learning I have had in years!”: What first-time users said

Another highlight from the Small Business Jam were the testimonials from first-time users of ChatGPT. While some small business owners had familiarity using AI tools, others said they had never used it before attending the Jam.

“This was the single most impactful learning I have had in years!” said Marcus Belardes, Vice President of Operations / Managing Partner of Oren's Hummus in San Francisco, CA. “I walked into the Jam with ZERO experience with AI and have leveraged my learnings almost daily since.”

“This is already saving me time and I've created multiple uses in minutes for what would have taken me hours,” Belardes said.

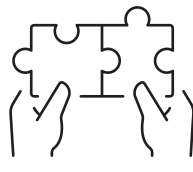
What was most valuable?



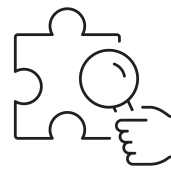
**Networking
and Learning
from Peers**



**Learning
Prompting
Skills & Tips**



**Hands-on
Exercises &
Practice**

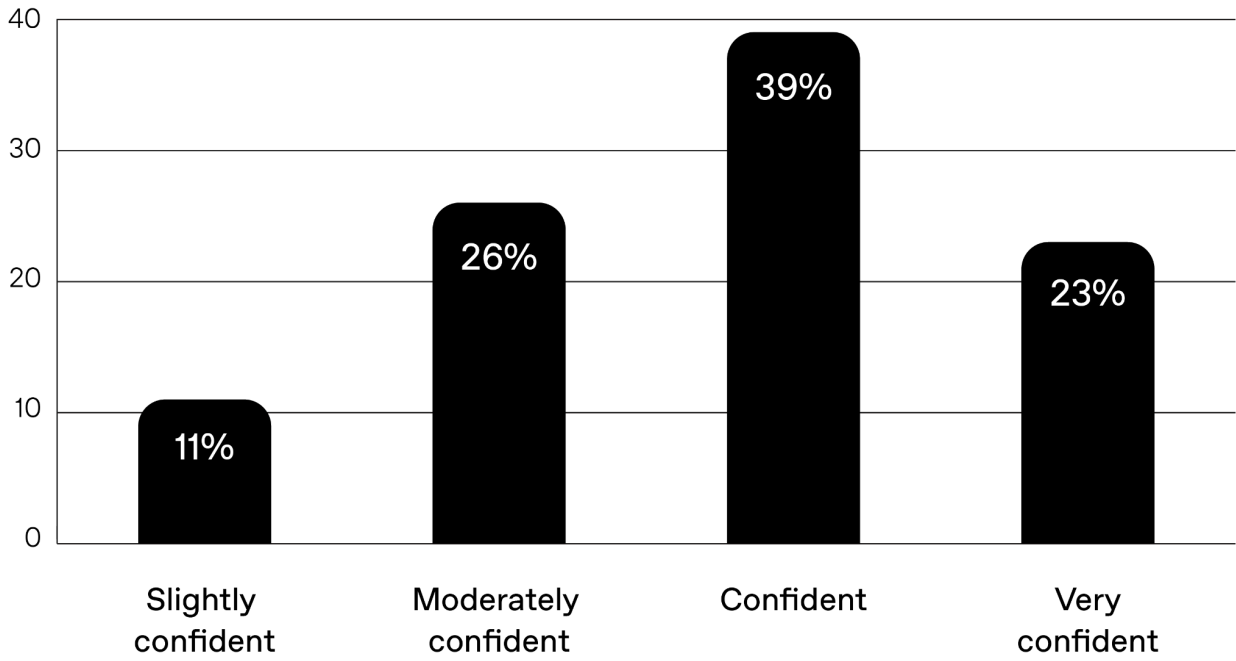


**Expert
Support & 1:1
Mentoring**



**Learning
ChatGPT
Features &
Application**

How confident do you feel using AI in your business?





“I built something really cool today!”: One solopreneur’s journey

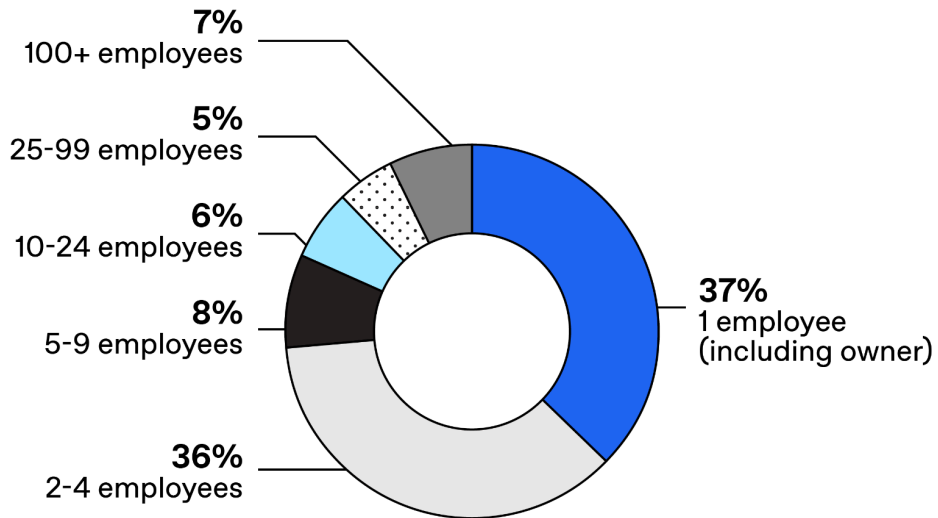
Like others who attended the Jam, Vaneese Johnson started her workforce consultancy business with the dream of helping others by using the skills she’d built over her career. But there’s a key difference: Johnson runs On the Move Careers on her own — without staff.

Now ChatGPT is serving as a virtual colleague for Johnson and other so-called “solopreneurs” across the country, a group that includes about 29.8 million businesses with no paid employees, which account for 6.8% of the country’s total economic activity, according to the latest published U.S. Census data.

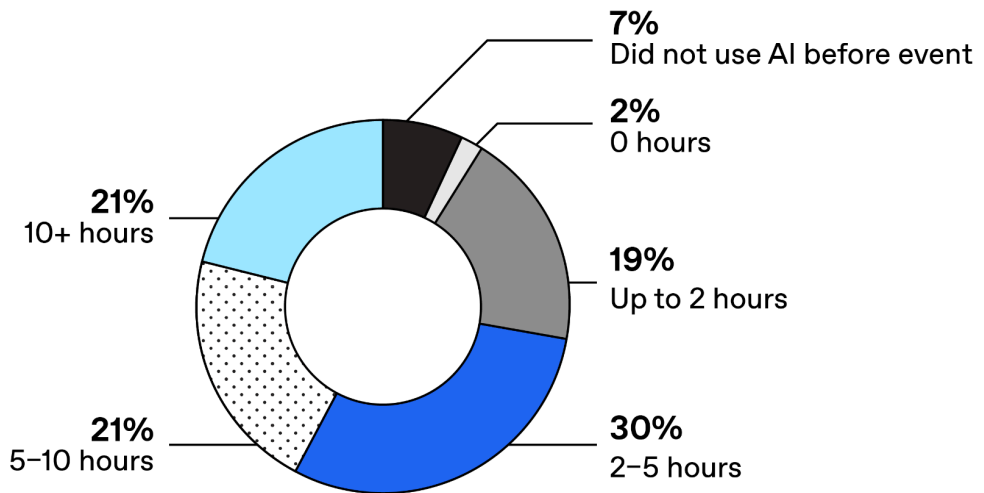
As an early ChatGPT adopter, Johnson came to the Jam “deeply curious” about how to get even more out of the tool. She decided to tackle a problem she had with business cards. “I needed a workflow to turn these business cards into leads,” she said, since she would meet great prospects at networking events, but rarely found time to upload their data to reconnect.

With ChatGPT, she built a step-by-step process at the Jam that uses her phone’s camera to capture each card, upload the contact info, and make it easy to reach out and track follow-ups: a system that monitors leads, and supports outreach to grow her business. “I built something really cool today,” she said.

Sizes of the Small Businesses at the Jam



Most participants report regular time savings from AI, with nearly three-quarters using it weekly



Houston

Houston Wash Pros

CL Scott,

<https://houstonwashpros.com/>



CL Scott, owner of Houston Washpros Power Washing, came to the Small Business Jam in Houston with some ChatGPT experience. In a brief speech to the audience, CL said he'd been teaching himself to use ChatGPT to fulfill tasks he'd otherwise have to do on his own.

"I had to be self taught because, as a startup, I just couldn't afford to pay for content creation that I needed to promote my company in the beginning. I spent countless hours doing everything myself, and it was such a tough learning curve."

Now, he's starting to save time by using ChatGPT for conducting customer research and drafting email communications. During the Jam, he built a social media "Top of Mind" GPT to help source potential customers and draft emails and other communications. "For these clients, we need to stay top of mind, for when the need arises, we'll be one of if not the first call they make."

CL, like many fellow Small Business Jam attendees, built his business "on determination, resilience, and the belief that hard work and the right opportunity can change your entire trajectory." He also shared his appreciation for the opportunity to learn more about how ChatGPT can help his business, and how Jam Day "allowed me to push my own limitations and learn at my own pace."

Detroit

What's The Dill Restaurant

Leona Milton,

<https://www.stuffmypickles.com/>

DoorDash Merchant

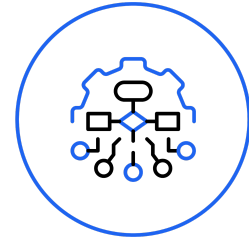


Leona Milton, the founder of What's The Dill restaurant and food service in Detroit, is already saving two hours a week by using AI.

Her business has six employees, including herself and her business partner (who is her husband). A DoorDash merchant, this family-run small business came to the Small Business Jam with the goal of focusing on inventory management and being able to better predict consumer demand.

Milton said that “learning commands and how to communicate with ChatGPT” was the most helpful part of the Jam. With the support of OpenAI volunteers, she discovered new ways to integrate the tool into her existing systems—eliminating the need to manually count inventory each day and better forecasting whether she had enough on hand to fulfill client catering requests.

“I didn’t walk in knowing exactly how to solve this,” Milton said. “I used ChatGPT as a thinking partner and talked through the problem, and it helped me uncover a solution I never would have found on my own.”



Participants' most popular workflows

Across the five different hubs, the most consistent benefit we heard from small business owners was simple: time savings. Owners are stretched thin, and the highest-value AI use cases were the ones that reduced repetitive work and turned “blank page” tasks into faster, clearer drafts and decisions. Ideas clustered around several recurring themes.

“This helps us, as a small business, spend more time on the tasks we’re best at,” shared one participant.

A large number of attendees focused on building custom assistants — or “GPTs for my business” — that draw on internal knowledge. Examples included a financial planning simulator, an internal FAQ for company policies, and customer intake and booking tools.

Content creation to support customer growth was another major theme. Participants developed systems for marketing plans, social media content, ads, and customer newsletters, while others focused on refreshing existing materials such as business taglines, logos, and mission statements.

Sales strategy and financial planning also featured prominently. Participants created tools for business roadmaps, sales pipelines, and monthly performance tracking. One small business owner built a workflow to research market competitiveness and analyze keywords for online ads, while another used 12 years of survey data to surface trends. Others addressed core administrative needs, including invoicing and budget drafting.

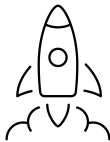
Operational use cases were similarly popular. Participants built tools for inventory management, scheduling automation, and recurring staff checklists. Many also explored AI as a way to strengthen training and onboarding, creating guides, process flows for hiring, and even internal GPTs to answer employee questions.

The strongest results came when participants started with a specific task they already did every week, and then built a repeatable prompt or workflow they could reuse immediately.

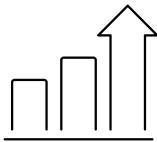
OpenAI volunteers from research, product, and engineering benefited from observing small business owners apply their learning and build tangible solutions in a single day. As with the Nonprofit Jam, volunteers left the Small Business Jam with a deeper understanding of user needs and a renewed

commitment to the “build with” approach—partnering with communities to shape solutions grounded in real-world experience.

Most popular workflows



Customer Growth



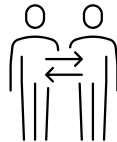
Sales & Customer Comms



Business Operations



Finance & Admin



Team/Staff Enablement



Custom Assistants & GPTs

Miami

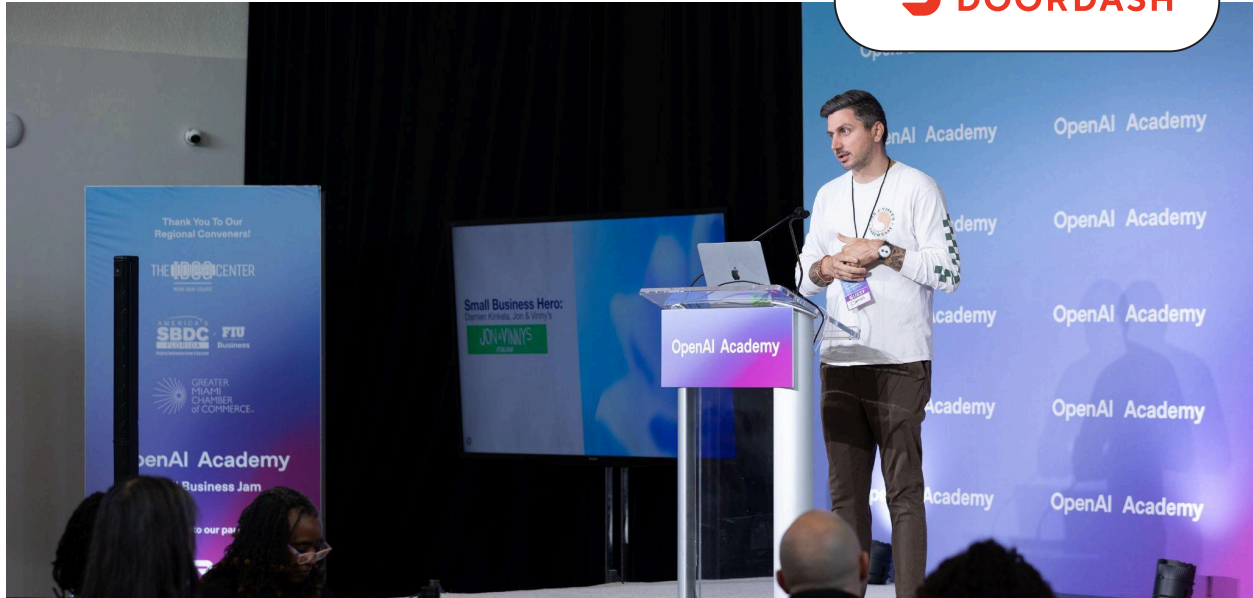
Jon & Vinny's

Damien Kinkela

*DoorDash Merchant

<https://www.jonandvinnys.com/home>

DoorDash Merchant



Damien Kinkela is the Managing Partner of Jon & Vinny's in Miami, a DoorDash merchant. Running multiple restaurant locations “makes it hard to keep purchasing, production, and scheduling perfectly aligned.” He’s also an avid ChatGPT user, and relies on ChatGPT to “turn our sales and product-mix data into accurate forecasts for purchasing, production, and labor. Those insights help us reduce waste, schedule more efficiently, and negotiate better pricing.” That used to take a ton of time and left room for human error, but Kinkela said using ChatGPT “directly improves our margins.”

Jam Day was also a great opportunity for Kinkela to network and contribute meaningfully to his small business community. He loved watching his peers have “aha” moments throughout the day.

New York

Franglais Management

Jessica Dolcy,

<https://www.franglaimgmt.com/>



Franglais Management is a consulting firm Jessica Dolcy founded in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, before the country's deteriorating security led her to return to New York last year. Her firm focuses on three things — economic development, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation — while supporting both international nonprofits and micro-entrepreneurs.

That work involves intensive field research, focus groups, translation and reporting, all designed to support those nonprofits and micro-entrepreneurs as they navigate their complex business environments. Dolcy already considered herself a ChatGPT “power user” before attending the Jam, using the AI tool for translations, research, data analysis, and drafting, but she came looking for “tips and tricks” to push her knowledge further.

With help from OpenAI volunteers, Dolcy built a custom GPT that reviews Requests for Proposals (the formal documents governments and organizations issue when soliciting bids from vendors like hers) and then runs a “go or no-go” checklist to help her decide whether it's worth her time to submit a proposal. Some RFPs run as long as 50 pages, and Dolcy says the new workflow takes just seconds.

"I was, like, this thing saves me half an hour to 45 minutes of every single RFP that I go through."

San Francisco

Atlas Skateboarding

Mike Manidis,

<https://atlasskateboarding.com>

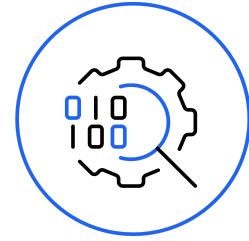


Skate-shop owner Mike Manidis arrived as an AI novice to the Small Business Jam in San Francisco: “AI is a big and powerful new tool that I am not using at all,” he said, concerned that he would “miss a giant opportunity to get ahead of competition.” One lesson was just seeing others already applying ChatGPT: “I was very surprised to just meet fellow business owners and realize how much they are already using it.”

His Jam Day build targeted a major time sink he faced: setting up Shopify point-of-sale (POS) product listings every time new inventory lands. “We have to manually create a product for every single item,” adding categories, variants, sizes, colors, brands, and descriptions. Manidis estimates those tasks take him about 10 hours per week, time he would rather spend doing what he loves: “talking to people and selling them skateboards.”

With ChatGPT, he found a repeatable catalog-to-Shopify workflow where the model can “look at catalogs that I upload to it, or just the web,” pull matching product descriptions, and “lay them out so we can just copy and paste them.”

Next, he plans to test AI prompts for task management for himself and his employees to keep his team aligned, because “there's so much to get done.”



Extending the Small Business Jam: Online Skill Labs

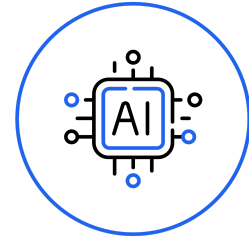
As part of the Small Business Jam, OpenAI Academy, DoorDash and SCORE are also offering virtual workshops for small business leaders who weren't able to join us on Jam Day. These one-hour online sessions are a fast, accessible introduction to the core skills and workflows taught at the in-person events.

OpenAI Academy hosted our first online Skill Lab on December 4 and the [next one](#) is planned for January 15, 2026.

In December's virtual session, we reviewed the fundamentals of prompting and step-by-step techniques for business owners to identify their business problems. The objective was for attendees to learn how to build simple, ready-to-use workflows with ChatGPT. We also had ChatGPT mentors online to answer questions in real-time.

Business owners from Tennessee, California, and across the country joined, as well as a few global attendees from Malaysia, Brazil, and Spain. The participants asked questions on topics ranging from launching paid services powered by ChatGPT to unifying workflows under one integrated system. One business owner from Idaho was able to ask questions on prompting, projects, and how ChatGPT can build on previously shared information about their company. A participant from New Jersey got guidance on which version of ChatGPT can best help him with operational efficiency for his cabinet-making business.

When asked to rate the online session on a 1-5 scale, 83% of attendees rated 4/5 they were very satisfied. After the session, one attendee said that "ChatGPT feels as if I have a highly skilled new employee that knows really everything."



Five takeaways on small business AI adoption

The Small Business Jam also helped all of us at OpenAI identify strategies for helping small businesses confidently adopt and use AI. The biggest breakthroughs came from making AI feel accessible, giving people space to experiment, and showing real examples from peers they trust. With hands-on practice, ready-to-use resources, and volunteer support, participants left with the skills — and the confidence — to keep building. We had five different takeaways:

1. Start with workflow-first learning.

Small business owners get the most value when AI is tied to a real, recurring task — like a marketing email, social content calendar, or simple spreadsheet — and they use AI to perform that task faster and more consistently.

2. Don't underestimate “simple” wins.

Small changes — like using AI to rewrite a product description, outline a workshop, or summarize customer feedback — often felt transformative, especially for solo owners wearing many hats.

3. Make tools work together.

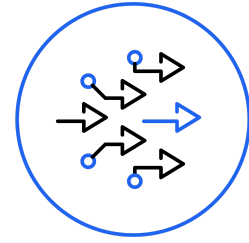
Connecting email, documents, or spreadsheets unlocked bigger wins than any single prompt. Even basic integrations — like pulling receipts into one place or drafting replies to common inquiries — saved hours.

4. Understand that existing skills still matter.

AI helps most when it's layered on top of existing expertise. Owners who knew their customers and numbers well were able to steer AI to better outputs and spot mistakes quickly.

5. Use peer community to accelerate learning.

Owners learned as much from each other's examples as they did from formal teaching. Sharing prompts, showing finished workflows, and comparing notes helped everyone move faster.



Conclusion

Small business owners have always been innovators. What we saw at the Small Business Jam is that when owners have access to practical AI tools, hands-on guidance, and time to build, they can translate that innovation into real operational gains — often in a single day.

Some 130 OpenAI staffers supported the Jam's five sites across the country to learn from the small business owners and provide tailored, in-person instruction. And the feedback was clear: direct, immersive learning can transform what's possible, regardless of how much participants knew about AI beforehand. It also reaffirmed that the solutions to hard problems often lie within the businesses themselves.

First-time users walked away with tools they could use immediately to save time and apply AI tools directly to core business decisions like pricing, marketing, and customer outreach. More experienced participants used the Jam to learn how to leverage ChatGPT's most powerful features, hone their skills, and build customized tools that they've already begun putting in place in their businesses. Many left not only with tangible new skills, but also with a renewed sense of optimism about what AI will be able to enable them to achieve in the future.

For us, the Jam highlighted the importance of democratizing access to AI so that it reaches as many people as possible, of partnering with local organizations that know their communities the best, and of listening to these groups so we can build tools *with* them instead of *for* them. This all speaks to how OpenAI's corporate structure — which started as a nonprofit, remains a nonprofit, and will continue to be a nonprofit — is designed to advance our mission of building AI that benefits all of humanity.

The Jam was one part of a broader effort. Continued support will be offered through [OpenAI Academy's Small Business chapter](#), launched with DoorDash, including tailored content, virtual sessions, and office hours with technical experts. Our [OpenAI Forum](#) provides another space for leaders from every field to deepen their understanding of AI, exchange ideas, and learn from each other's successes and setbacks.

We'll host future Jams — both in-person and virtual — and will refine the structure and format of the training programs, providing more mentoring, maintaining a way of providing ongoing peer support, and continuing to meet organizations where they are.

From a restaurant manager in San Francisco learning to use OpenAI tools to build his own website, to a prosthetics maker in Detroit learning to use AI to handle patient documentation and other paperwork, small businesses face complex challenges, and AI can tangibly impact their work for the better. Their work couldn't be more important to the future of our economy, and we're honored to support it.

The Small Business Jam illustrated the kind of future OpenAI aims to build: one where AI works for everyone, and Main Street has full access to a transformative technology that gives them every advantage possible to succeed.

OpenAI Small Business Jam made possible with



With support of

