03 / MEASUREMENT THE BUSINESS CASE

Put the hours back into the business case

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An AI pilot can save time and still leave the buyer unsure whether it was worth the money. Usually, the missing step is explaining what happens to the time once it is available.

A seller who spends less time preparing can cover more useful conversations. An operations team can absorb more work before it needs another hire. A fixed-fee service can take fewer hours to deliver. Those are different economic paths, and each needs its own evidence.

I start with the task. Time it as people actually perform it, including checking, correcting and putting the result where someone can use it. The model's response time is only one part of that work.

01
Time the whole task

02
Include operating effort

03
Trace the economic path

03 / MEASUREMENT THE WORKED CALCULATION

A worked example

Consider a team preparing 30 sales follow-ups per week. The following numbers are illustrative, not a client result. Replace them with timings from your own workflow.

Measure	Current process	Pilot
Comparable completed follow-ups per week	30	30
Minutes per task, including review	24	10
Total task minutes	720	300
Additional weekly maintenance	0	90
Total time	720 minutes	390 minutes

The pilot returns 330 minutes, or 5.5 hours each week. The 58% reduction in task time becomes a 46% reduction after maintenance is included. That is why the operating work belongs in the calculation. If you want to value the time, use your own hourly figure for the people doing this work.

If rejected outputs were redone manually, add that time. If the pilot used easier cases, fix the comparison. Record abandoned tasks so that the fastest successes do not become the whole story.

ILLUSTRATIVE CALCULATION / NOT A CLIENT RESULT

720 − (300 + 90) = **330 minutes returned**
5.5 hours per week, after maintenance.

03 / MEASUREMENT CAPACITY & EVIDENCE

Decide what those hours will do

Suppose the team uses the time for additional qualified customer conversations. Track whether those conversations happen and what comes next. If management intends to defer a hire, record the workload that would otherwise have required it. If the work is billed by the hour, examine write-offs, service quality and additional demand before assuming faster delivery increases revenue.

The same workflow can be valuable for different reasons. A CRO might care most about response speed. A COO might need the same output to require fewer handoffs. Finance will want to understand implementation cost, ongoing subscriptions, maintenance and the route from capacity to an actual financial effect.

Keep four lines in the value record

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Operational change: net hours returned on a defined task and cohort.
Use of capacity: the additional work the team actually completed.
Financial effect: an expense avoided or reduced, if one occurred.
Commercial effect: resulting opportunities or revenue, with record IDs.
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Do not add these lines together as if they were independent benefits. If the same hours support an avoided hire, counting their capacity value again as cash saving would double-count the result. Similarly, pipeline and closed revenue sit at different stages of the same commercial path.

Agree the primary measure before the pilot begins. Keep the quality standard alongside it, because lower effort is useful only if the output remains fit for the work. Review the economics again after normal use, when corrections and maintenance are visible.

The first investment decision becomes easier when the buyer can inspect this calculation and name what changes in the team's week. Bring the recurring task, its frequency and a few timed examples to the first conversation. We can work from there.

03 / WORKFLOW MAP PUT THE ARTICLE TO WORK

Trace hours to an evidenced effect

Use one comparable task and cohort. Follow the value path without counting the same benefit twice.

01

Set the baseline and quality standard

Time preparation, checking, corrections and delivery. Agree the primary measure before the pilot.

02

Calculate the net time returned

Illustrative example: 720 current minutes – 390 pilot minutes = 330 minutes, or 5.5 hours per week.

The pilot total includes 90 minutes of weekly maintenance.

03

Name what the capacity will do

Additional qualified conversations, more workload before another hire, or fewer hours in fixed-fee delivery.

04

Record what actually happened

Keep operational change, use of capacity, financial effect and commercial effect distinct.

Link opportunities or revenue to records. Do not add overlapping benefits together.

05

Review after normal use

Include rejected and abandoned tasks, implementation cost, subscriptions, corrections and maintenance.

COMPARISON GATE	EVIDENCE GATE
Easier pilot cases? Fix the comparison. Rejected outputs redone manually? Add that time.	Returned hours alone do not establish cash savings or revenue. Record the actual expense or commercial effect.

Workflow synthesis based on this article. Read alongside the full examples and qualifications.