

Across the UK, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are diving headfirst into the world of artificial intelligence (AI). From innovative startups to established family businesses, there's a clear drive to leverage AI tools like **ChatGPT** and **Copilot** to save time and boost productivity. Yet many are discovering a common conundrum: while AI speeds up tasks, the rate of errors or quality issues can increase unexpectedly.

At SME News, we've closely followed this journey, especially in the build-up to the **Southern Enterprise Awards 2026**. Feedback from award nominees and winners points to a critical gap between implementing AI tools and rethinking existing workflows. As highlighted by AI Global Media, enterprises that expect AI to just slot into old processes risk quality control failures and escalating *AI errors*.

Why Are Errors Increasing Despite Faster Workflows?

Before rushing to replace staff or blame the AI tool, it's important to ask:

What Changed in the Workflow?

Successful use of AI isn't plug-and-play. Many SMEs adopt ChatGPT or Copilot to automate steps like drafting emails, generating reports, or coding snippets. However, if the existing *review process* stays the same or weakens, errors creep in.

- **AI output is probabilistic, not perfect:** AI generates answers based on patterns, sometimes producing plausible but incorrect content.
- **Humans shift from doing to reviewing:** If you don't redesign workflows to include effective quality control, inaccuracies aren't caught.
- **Blind trust in AI:** Without domain expertise checking outputs, subtle errors can slip into client communications or reports.

It's a classic case of "speeding up a flawed process." AI isn't magic; it magnifies whatever you do with it.

Case Study: An SME's Reality Check with ChatGPT and Copilot

Consider a regional consultancy using Copilot to generate technical documentation. While the AI reduced drafting time by 40%, post-delivery client feedback revealed inaccuracies and inconsistencies, causing rework and frustration.

Metric	Before AI	After AI Implementation
Drafting time	5 days	3 days
Error rate in final docs	3%	8%
Client rework required	Low	Medium

The root cause analysis showed the review process remained unchanged, relying on just one QA person juggling multiple responsibilities. Without more rigorous checks and domain training for staff, the speed benefits were undermined by growing quality issues.



The Gap Between AI Usage and Process Redesign

This gap is where many SMEs stumble. Organisations often introduce AI tools motivated by headlines about automation but neglect to rethink:

- Who owns the AI workflow end-to-end?
- How does output quality get verified?
- Which manual steps can be retired versus which need supervision?
- How do we train existing staff to become effective AI reviewers?

AI adoption is not just technology implementation — it's a process transformation. As AI Global Media points out, "Without redesign, you just automate inefficiency."

Training Existing Staff vs Hiring New Specialists

One tempting fix is to hire AI smenews.digital specialists or data scientists. While expertise is valuable, SMEs face budget and cultural challenges with new hires:

- Specialists may focus on advanced models rather than frontline quality control.
- Existing teams hold vital business context and understand customer requirements.
- Building AI literacy internally drives better ownership and sustainable improvements.

Our recommendation? Invest in tailored training programmes to empower your existing team to:

1. Understand AI capabilities and limitations (e.g., Hallucinations in ChatGPT outputs).
2. Develop critical review skills for AI-generated content.
3. Collaborate with AI, staying alert to errors and discrepancies.

This approach balances speed and quality, and leverages your team's domain expertise — a vital complement to any AI tool.

Project Leadership: Championing AI and Automation Success

Achieving these changes requires strong, clear leadership. The role of AI project leader emerges as crucial:

- **Workflow ownership:** Who redesigns the process end-to-end?
- **Governance and standards:** How do you establish quality criteria for AI outputs?
- **Training and adoption support:** How do you build AI confidence and skills across teams?
- **Feedback loops:** How does the team report, diagnose, and improve AI-assisted errors?

In SMEs, this leader may not be an AI guru but someone who deeply understands current operations and can coordinate between tech and frontline staff. SME News' coverage of the **Southern Enterprise Awards 2026** reinforces that companies with clear AI ownership and cross-team collaboration perform best.

Practical Steps to Reduce AI Errors and Improve Quality Control

Here's a practical checklist to help SMEs bridge the gap between using AI and reducing errors:

1. **Map current workflows:** Identify what tasks AI is accelerating and what manual checks remain.
2. **Reassess review processes:** Add extra layers of verification targeted at the new AI risks.
3. **Train teams:** Use scenario-based training to improve staff ability to spot AI errors.
4. **Define governance:** Create guidelines for responsible AI use, including data protection and bias mitigation.
5. **Implement feedback loops:** Encourage users to log AI errors and refine prompts or processes accordingly.
6. **Evaluate ROI carefully:** Measure time saved against error correction costs to fine-tune the AI implementation.

Conclusion: AI Is a Tool, Not a Silver Bullet

AI tools like ChatGPT and Copilot have incredible potential to transform SME operations. However, the story from the ground is clear — faster workflows can come with a spike in AI errors if organisations treat AI as just a new prompt box without revisiting who reviews outputs and how.

Success lies not just in technology adoption but in thoughtful process redesign, upskilling existing teams, and appointing dedicated leadership to oversee AI governance and quality control. For SMEs preparing to compete — and win — in the AI era, these lessons are crucial.

As you plan your AI journey, remember the insights shared by SME News and **Southern Enterprise Awards 2026** finalists, and the expert commentary from AI Global Media. Embrace AI cautiously, champion quality, and watch both your speed and accuracy improve sustainably.



Have you experienced similar challenges with AI in your SME? Share your stories and questions below.