

THE AI ENGINEER



TALENT
MARKET
UPDATE



HI THERE,



The AI Engineer is the most critical and structurally hardest-to-fill role globally right now.

Every industry, from healthcare and finance to manufacturing and legal, is now building AI into its core products. This means the competition for AI talent is now industry agnostic.

Startups have invented the game and they still dominate the race to the best AI talent in the market. A few of the more 'established companies' are learning, though most are failing.

The importance of securing AI Talent is now mission critical for every company.

So how can Startups defend their position, and Established companies catch up winning the candidates that will dictate the future of their business?

1 HOW BIG BUSINESS CAN COMPETE

2 WHAT AI ENG'S WANT

3 AUSTRALIAN REALITY CHECK

4 THE SKILLS-BASED MIRAGE

5 HOW TO FIND AND WIN THEM

6 DO YOU NEED ONE?



HOW BIG BUSINESS CAN COMPETE



ESTABLISHED ORGS HAVE A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Some of the great AI talent wants to work with established businesses for three key reasons, however most don't understand how to position and structure their worth:

1 REAL-WORLD IMPACT & BIG DATA

Large, regulated industries offer the massive, proprietary datasets and real-world impact that some engineers prefer over more 'unstable' startup environments.

2 USE YOUR LEVERAGE

Startups are cash and resource poor, relying heavily on referrals. Established companies must leverage their capital and human resources and redesign their recruitment strategy to access this passive talent first.

3 FOCUS & STABILITY

The financial stability of established companies provides AI engineers with the runway they need to focus on building defensible IP rather than rushing short-term features.

Source: Real Time's Sonar, The Pragmatic Engineer

WHAT THEY NEED TO LEARN FROM STARTUPS

Strategy	Traditional Approach	The Modern Playbook
Work Trials	5-stage & abstract coding interviews	2-3 day paid, real-world work trials.
Personalised Sourcing	Automated, templated recruiter spam	Tailored candidate collateral and custom landing pages.
Flexible Processes	Rigid, out-of-the-box SWE testing structures	Bespoke processes tailored to individual candidate motivations.
Full Access	"We're like a startup within a big org" messaging	Full transparency with actual datasets & problem spaces.

WHAT AI ENGINEERS WANT



UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT PSYCHOLOGY OF AN AI ENGINEER IS THE KEY TO WINNING THEM.

THEY CARE ABOUT...	THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT...
Core Business Impact Building the revenue engine, not just a side-feature.	Your 5-Year Vision They're not concerned in your long-term roadmap, they care about what they can ship in the next 3-6 months.
An Elite Tech Stack Access to cutting-edge GPUs and friction-free MLOps pipelines. LLM Wiki's, sandboxes, knowledge graphs, code factories etc.	Corporate Prestige & Awards The caliber of the team matters more than the company's PR.
An Intellectual Peer Group Working with and learning from other high-caliber builders, even Kaggle Grandmasters!	Career Ladders Progression is measured by models shipped, not by climbing a ladder.
High Shipping Velocity The autonomy to test, deploy, and iterate without bureaucratic red tape.	Yesterday's Systems They want to architect intelligence , not do routine system administration or plumbing.
"Data Gravity" Access to massive, proprietary datasets that they can't get anywhere else.	Prescriptive Management They expect autonomy. A manager who dictates the how instead of defining the what is a red flag.

THE AUSTRALIAN REALITY CHECK



CURRENT TALENT POOL

40,000

AI Specialists across Australia



THE SHORTFALL

Demand is tracking toward 140,000 roles by 2027.
We are staring down a massive...

60,000

person shortfall in the Australian market.



TIME TO HIRE

8-12
WEEKS



stretching to 4 - 6
months for senior or
highly specialized hires.

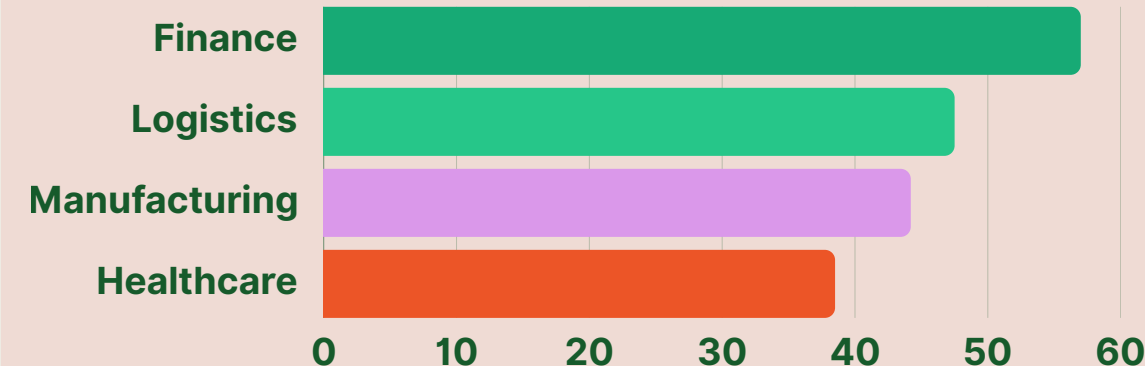
ADOPTION

Since 2024, enterprise use of
generative AI jumped from



55% → 75%

CROSS-SECTOR DEMAND



GLOBAL SCARCITY

1.6 M OPEN ROLES

with roughly **518,000** qualified
candidates to fill them

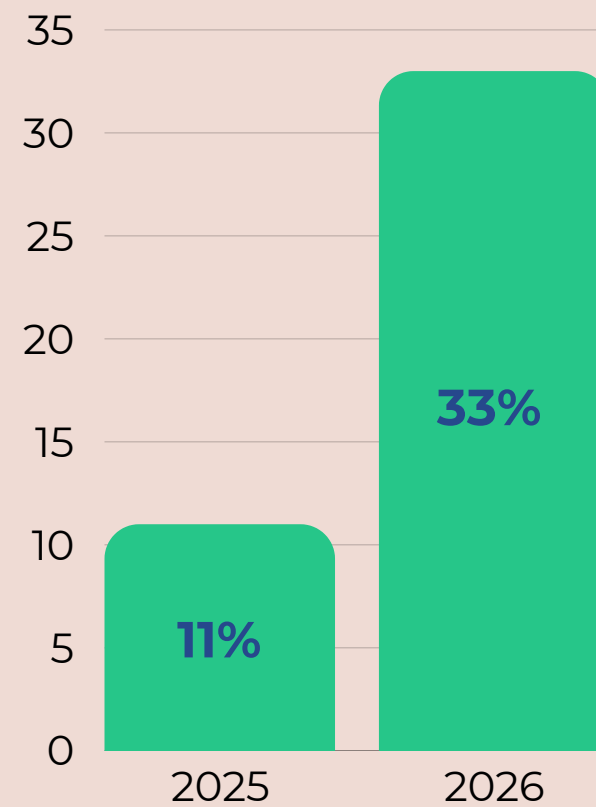


THE SKILLS-BASED MIRAGE



WE DON'T HAVE AN AI ADOPTION PROBLEM - WE HAVE A SKILLS-MEASUREMENT PROBLEM.

SKILLS NEEDED



AI skill requirements have tripled since 2025. **33% of entry jobs now require them.**

THE REALITY GAP

Companies claiming **skills-based hiring** (85%)



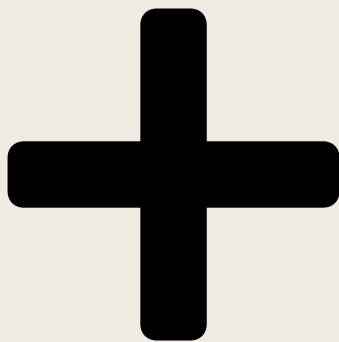
Hires actually reflecting that (0.14%)

THE STAGNATION

<50%

of employers plan to expand **skills-based systems** next year.

HOW TO FIND THEM AND WIN THEM



Hiring an AI Engineer is much easier when you have a [Talent Engineer](#) or Talent Engineering system. [Check out our report here.](#)

You cannot use traditional hiring methods and expect to win elite AI talent. Here are some tips:

- 1

HIRE THE TINKERER, NOT THE PhD

Scrap the "5+ years of experience" and look for the scrappy product engineers obsessed with AI.
- 2

HUNT WHERE OTHERS AREN'T LOOKING

The best talent aren't active on LinkedIn. They are contributing to the open-source tools your team already uses.
- 3

FIX YOUR INTERVIEW PROCESS, NOW.

The standard Australian AI hiring cycle is far too long, currently 6-8 weeks. With an **76% offer acceptance rate**, the problem is speed to offer.
- 4

BUILD THE PIPELINE BEFORE YOU NEED IT

Hiring managers can't find talent, and talent can't cut through the noise. You need a modern, outbound sourcing strategy.

Role	Base Salary (Permanent)
Applied AI Engineer	\$200,000 - \$380,000+
AI Platform Engineer	\$220,000 - \$350,000+
AI Infrastructure Engineer	\$240,000+
AI Research Scientist	\$300k+

DO YOU NEED AN AI ENGINEER?

YES, IF

You want to **build proprietary foundation models** or custom neural architectures from scratch.

Your data science team is building complex models that **never make it to production**.

Your core product requires **deep, specialised machine learning research** to create a competitive moat.

You need to build highly custom **MLOps infrastructure** to train models on massive, proprietary datasets.

NO, IF

You are plugging into what Anthropic and OpenAI already **spent billions building**.

Your actual requirements are a **vector database, prompt routing, a clever UI, and third-party API calls**.

You need a **scrappy product engineer** obsessed with AI who knows how to ship intuitive user experiences quickly.

Your use of AI is limited to **off-the-shelf SaaS tools** and basic custom integrations.



WHO WE ARE

AUSTRALIA'S LEADING AI RECRUITMENT TEAM

10,000 PLACEMENTS
1,000 TECH COMPANIES
35 YEARS OF FAMILY LED BUSINESS

3,000 CANDIDATE CONVERSATIONS PER WEEK
EXCLUSIVE AI PLATFORM INTEGRATION
15 WONDERFULLY HUMAN HUMANS



realtimeaustralia.com



airtree

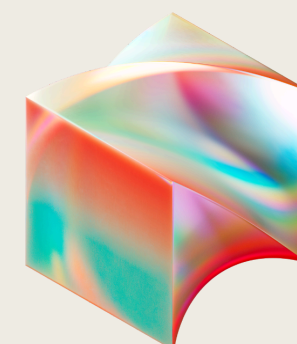
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NETFLIX

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ATLASSIAN



BLOCK