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The Founder's Guide to AI Governance

What it is, why it matters sooner than you think, and where to start.

You didn't set out to become an AI governance expert. But a handful of small, cheap habits now will save you a lot of expensive scrambling later.

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Why this matters now, not later

A few years ago, AI governance was something only banks and hospitals worried about. That's changed fast. Investors ask about it during due diligence. Enterprise customers put it in procurement questionnaires before they'll sign. And the EU AI Act, UK regulatory guidance, and standards like ISO 42001 are turning what used to be optional good practice into something closer to table stakes.

Here's the part founders miss: governance is far cheaper to build in now than to retrofit later. When you're five people, “know what AI you use and who owns it” is an afternoon's work. When you're fifty, it's a project. The businesses that get caught out aren't the ones using AI recklessly — they're the ones who never noticed how much of it had crept in.

“The businesses that get caught out aren't reckless. They're just the ones who never took stock.”

Three mistakes founders make

1

Not knowing what AI you're actually using

AI features are quietly built into your CRM, support desk, and analytics tools. Most founders can name the tools they chose — almost none can name the ones that came bundled in.

Do this instead: Spend 30 minutes listing every tool that touches your business, and flag which use AI.

2

Treating AI output as automatically correct

AI tools sound confident even when they're wrong. Left unchecked, that confidence ends up in a customer email or a decision nobody double-checked.

Do this instead: Decide which decisions always get a human look before they go out the door.

3

No one owns it

“The team” is not an owner. If nobody is specifically accountable, nothing gets maintained until something's already gone wrong.

Do this instead: Name one person. It doesn't need to be a full-time role — it needs to be a name.

The landscape, and a 5-minute gut-check

The landscape, in one page

You'll hear these terms come up. Here's what they mean, without the jargon.

EU AI Act — Europe's AI law. Most small businesses using off-the-shelf tools are “deployers,” with lighter obligations than AI builders.

ISO/IEC 42001 — The international standard for managing AI risk — the AI equivalent of ISO 27001.

NIST AI RMF — A US framework built around four steps: Govern, Map, Measure, Manage.

UK GDPR / ICO — The UK's data protection rules, relevant whenever an AI tool touches personal data.

Your 5-minute gut-check

Answer honestly. This isn't scored — just a quick read on where you stand.

1. Can you list every AI tool your business uses, right now?
2. Does a human review AI-generated content before it reaches a customer or investor?
3. Could you name the one person accountable for AI governance today?
4. Do you know what happens to your data inside the AI tools you use?
5. Have you checked for AI features hiding inside your other software?

No to two or more? You're in good company — and there's a clear, cheap next step.

WHERE TO GO NEXT

The GUARD Starter Kit

£99 · turns this guide into action

- ✓ GUARD Readiness Assessment
- ✓ AI Acceptable Use Policy
- ✓ AI Risk Register
- ✓ GUARD Roadmap
- ✓ AI Use-Case & Tool Inventory
- ✓ AI Vendor Risk Checklist
- ✓ AI Governance Glossary
- ✓ A free Governance Snapshot review

Get the Starter Kit — £99

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