MANIFEST 2026 · DALLAS

What I'd do with AI if I ran your shop.

Matt Marcotte · real shops, real numbers, no hype

5:50 AM

Every morning at 5:50, my chief of staff briefs me. It has already read my email, listened to yesterday’s calls, and checked every quote, invoice, and deadline against what I promised this week.

My chief of staff is an AI. A second AI checks its work. They hold the night shift, every night.

It even calls me out when I’m the one slipping. I’ll show you how, later.

AI is not a tool you buy.

It’s an employee you direct.

The cheapest, fastest, most patient employee you will ever hire. The bottleneck was never the software. It’s whether you can tell it what good looks like.

HANDS UP IF THIS IS YOU

Your week, right now

10 PM, still quoting

You printed all day. The office work starts when the shop closes.

Art-file ping-pong

A blurry screenshot, four emails asking for something usable, still not approved.

Quotes dying in silence

One shop I recently worked with had 246 open quotes nobody ever followed up on over the last 2 years

The shop lives in your head

Pricing, status, how every customer likes it. That’s why you can’t hire, or leave.

Not one of these is a printing problem. They’re staffing problems. You’ve just never been able to afford the staff.

#MattStats

THE OFFICIAL STATS OF THE MATT



Matt Marcotte
Owner, Sound & Fury.
Fractional CTO

Powered by ADHD.
Finished by AI.

20
years in decorated apparel

1,000+
shops helped with printing, process and tech

Dozens
of seminars taught and stages spoken on

36,500
burpees in one year. 100 a day, every day.

2,800
shops using my free ScreenPrintGPT tools

Hermes
favorite AI tool right now. Dot is a close second.

$1,200
a month on AI and apps. Still cheaper than a part-timer.

Not my job
unread emails. My AI assistant handles those now.

1
days since a bird pooped on me

VERIFIED

> ***"Impatiently productive."*** Inktavo's CEO, describing me. Pretty sure it was a compliment.



#MATTSTATS · EXHIBIT A

Every stat gets a receipt. Even this one.

1 bird
yesterday, right here at Manifest

1 pair
of pants packed for the whole trip

Same pants. You’re looking at them.

Fractional CTO

test subjects

CAMPUS INK
CAMPUS.INK

Khufu
their AI teammate, living in Slack

Tickets
filed by the agent, straight from the conversation

Creative Ops
Tracking all their NIL business, stores, and products.

OKLAHOMA SHIRT CO.
OKLAHOMASHIRTCOMPANY.COM

90%
of each web quote, written automatically

50% → 100%
of jobs press-ready by 7 AM

Custom Data Dashboards
No more playing Where's Waldo with your data

Actual outcomes. Not AI slop.

HANDS UP

Where does your shop sit?



80% use ChatGPT like Google **15%** automated one thing **5%** run agents

.

88%
of large companies use AI somewhere · McKinsey, 2025

20%
of all U.S. businesses do · U.S. Census BTOS, May 2026

You’re probably in the gray bar. So are your competitors. That’s your head start.

THE REAL GAP

Everyone's using it. Few are profiting.

88%

use AI somewhere

of the companies surveyed

39%

see any profit from it

and most of them say it's under 5%

6%

make real money with it

McKinsey calls them "high performers"

Using AI is easy. Profiting from it is the gap. Today is about how to be the 6%.

McKinsey, The State of AI, 2025

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR A SHOP YOUR SIZE

You can’t hire your way out. Now you don’t have to.

1.9M U.S. manufacturing jobs could go unfilled by 2033. Deloitte & The Manufacturing Institute, 2024

THE HIRE YOU KEEP PUTTING OFF

$40K vs. $20

A front-office person, or about $20 a month that starts today.

EVERY HAT IS YOURS

Hours come back

Nobody to delegate to, so every hour AI takes lands back in your hands.

YOUR REAL ADVANTAGE

Move by Friday

No committee, no IT department. Speed is what you have on the big shops.

280× cheaper in two years: $20 per million tokens to $0.07. Nothing else in your shop got 280× cheaper.

Stanford HAI, AI Index Report 2025 (GPT-3.5-level model, Nov 2022 to Oct 2024)

AI is not going to take your job.

Somebody using it is.

WHERE WE'RE GOING

The Three Hires

HIRE 1

The Intern

You tell it exactly what to do. Emails, quotes, SOPs, art.

HIRE 2

The Specialist

A role, a standard, and the keys to your data.

HIRE 3

The Department

A staff that runs while you sleep, checked by a second AI.

HIRE 1

The Intern

1

You tell it exactly what to do. Every time. It does what you say, and nothing more.

Every shop should start here, and most AI advice stops here. I'll prove it works in 90 seconds, then take you somewhere it doesn't go.

CHECK-IN · HANDS UP

Hands up if a quote request sat more than a day this month.

Keep it up if it was more than one.

7× **more likely to land the lead when you answer within the hour. The average business took 42 hours.**

Harvard Business Review, 2011 · audit of 2,241 U.S. companies

INTERN JOB 1 · THE EMAIL

The 10 PM quote pile

“How much for shirts?” Three lines, no quantity, no sizes, no date, art is a photo of a hat.

THE PROMPT, EXACTLY AS TYPED

```
You are my front office. Below is a quote request that just came in. Pull out what I need to price it: quantity, garment, colors, print locations, due date, and whether they have real art. List what’s missing. Then draft a friendly reply in my voice that asks for only the missing pieces, tells them our current turnaround, and makes it easy to say yes.
[paste the customer’s email, text, or Facebook message]
```

Tonight it’s a prompt you paste. By Hire 3, it answers before you even see the email.

That wasn’t magic.
It was a job description.

THE ROLE	“You are my front office” Who you hired them to be
THE SITUATION	“Here’s the quote request that just came in” The real context, the brief you’d give a person
THE CONSTRAINTS	“Ask for only what’s missing. Make it easy to say yes.” What a good outcome must include
THE STANDARD	“Friendly, in my voice. No corporate filler.” What good looks like when it’s done

That’s the whole skill. **Here’s what it’s worth.**

INTERN JOB 2 · THE ART

$3,000

A customer brought me art that five professional shops had turned down as garbage. I said yes in five minutes, and it became a $3,000 order.

Not because I’m good at software. Five shops were thinking like tool users.
I was thinking like a director.

TOOL USER

“Remove the background.”

DIRECTOR

“This prints 2 colors on a black shirt. Keep the lettering sharp. Make it match the original.”

INTERN JOB 3 · THE MANUAL

Get the shop out of your head.

STEP 1

Talk while you work

Voice memo while you set up the next job. Rambling is fine.

STEP 2

It writes the manual

“Turn this into an SOP a brand-new hire could follow.” One a week.

STEP 3

Now you can hire

Three months in: a training manual and a real shot at a vacation.

The first employee AI helps you hire might be a human.

Same skill every time.

You write the job description.

HIRE 2

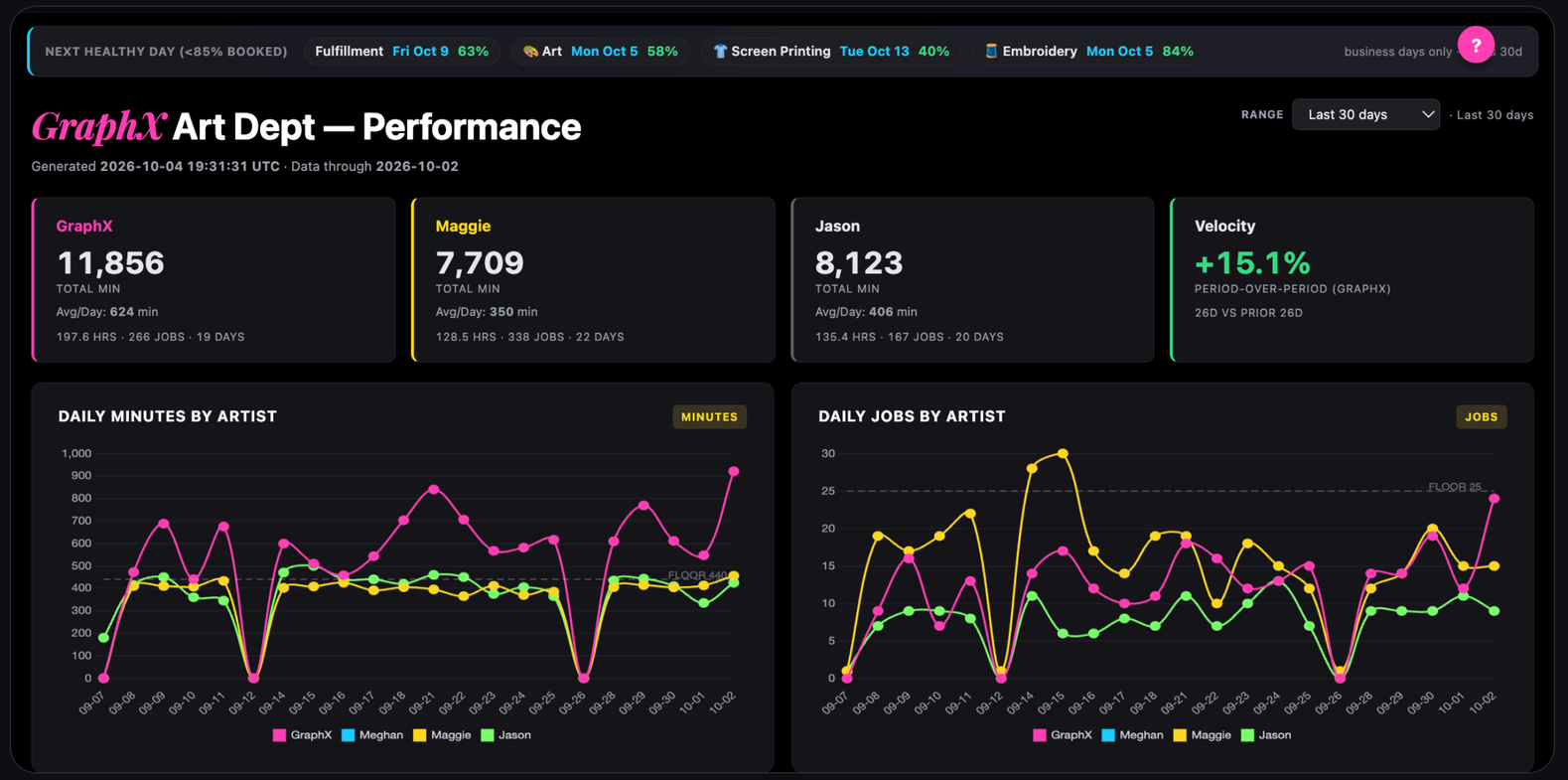
The Specialist

Stop typing into a blank box. Hand it a role, a standard, and the keys to your data.

Printavo, a spreadsheet, or a Gmail inbox full of quotes. This is where it stops being a chatbot.

Every art job, timed.

REAL SHOP · OKLAHOMA SHIRT CO.



SAME KIND OF ART JOB

23 min fastest artist

49 min slowest artist

Over twice the time. Nobody knew until every job got timed.

+15%

art throughput, period over period, thanks to AI tracking that showed us where we were losing time

The data was always in the shop software. Nobody looked.

What comes back

DEMO DATA

THE ASK: You are my sales manager. Every open quote over $1K untouched 7 days: pull the job, draft a follow-up in my voice.

STALLED QUOTES OVER $1K

Northside Youth Soccer	$1,850
Harvest Church	$1,240
Miller HVAC	$2,760
Trailhead Brewing	$2,080

$7,930 sitting still. 4 drafts ready

DRAFT · IN YOUR VOICE

Subject: Northside spring jerseys: locking in your print window

Hey Coach. That two-color crest still looks sharp. We're building next week's schedule and I'd hate for you to lose the slot before the season opener. Want me to hold Tuesday? One word back and it's yours.

- Matt

Ten seconds. $7,930 in stalled quotes is a week of production for a lot of shops.

CHECK-IN · HANDS UP

Hands up if you know your quote win rate.

Without opening anything. Just say it out loud in your head.

Now the real version

REAL SHOP · OKLAHOMA SHIRT CO.

> *Their dashboard said they won 84% of quotes. Nobody believed it, so we dug in.*

QUOTE WIN RATE

~~84%~~ **~65%**

once we fixed the math. A filter was hiding the lost quotes.

NEVER FOLLOWED UP

246

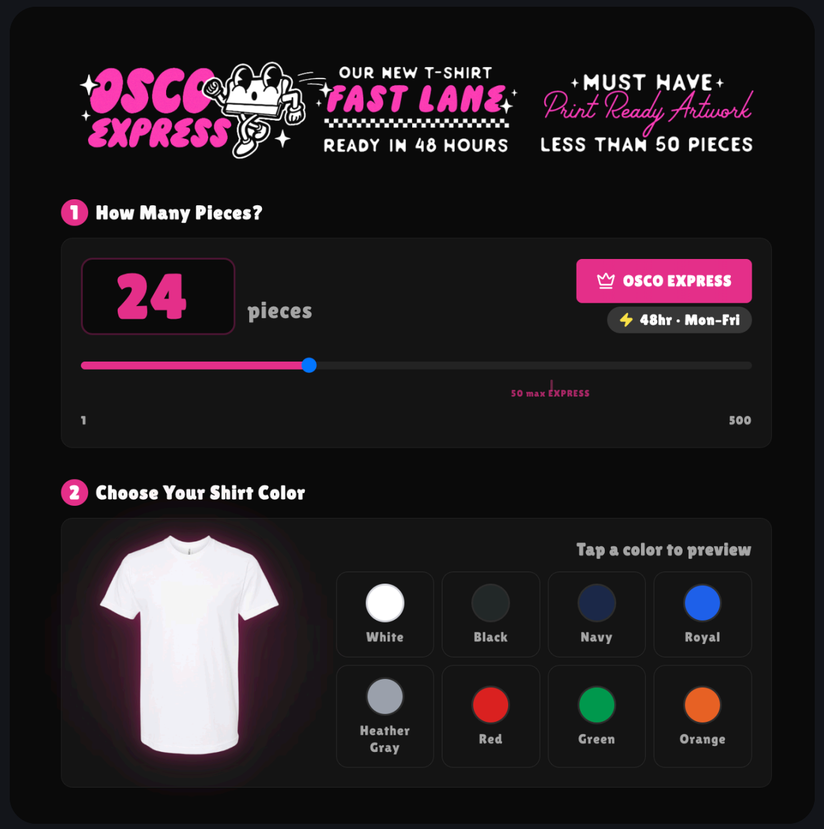
open quotes. 76 stale ones now land on a daily list.

JOB AUDITS

5× a day

missing art, blanks or approval flagged before anyone asks.

The data was in their shop software the whole time. Nobody looked.



OSCO.EXPRESS

The best quote is the one nobody writes.

44
orders, all new customers

230
shirts

$5,477
paid. Zero quotes written

Instant price, art check for DPI and size, Stripe checkout, straight to production. Small orders that used to eat a rep’s afternoon.

Under 50 pieces, 48 hours, and the customer did all the typing.

CHECK-IN · HANDS UP

Hands up if you've Googled your own shop this year.

Keep it up if you've asked ChatGPT about it.

Your customers already asked it. Here's what it told them.

Your next customer asks AI which shop to use.

A TEAM MOM, TONIGHT

“Who can print 50 hoodies with our logo by Friday near me?”

Three shops come back. Is yours one of them?

15% → 8%

of Google searches end with a click to a website. 15% on a normal results page, 8% when an AI answer shows up on top.

Pew Research, 2025 · 900 U.S. adults, 69,000 searches

A complete Google profile. Current, not from 2019.

Answers in plain text. Turnaround, minimums, what you print.

Reviews that say things. “50 hoodies in four days.”

GET FOUND · SEO FOR THE AI ERA

Make it easy for AI to recommend you.

LLMS.TXT

A cheat sheet for AI

One plain-text page: what you print, minimums, turnaround, where you ship.

SCHEMA

Labels machines read

Hours, address, services and FAQs, tagged so Google doesn’t guess.

FAQ PAGE

Answer the real question

“50 hoodies by Friday?” gets its own answer, in your words.

SITEMAP + PING

Tell them it changed

Search engines hear about a new page the day you post it.

THE PROMPT

```
Read my website. Write my llms.txt, my LocalBusiness schema, and 10 FAQs built from questions customers actually ask me. Ask me for anything you can’t find. Don’t make anything up.
```

Live on my shop’s site and on marcotte.ink. You don’t need to know what JSON-LD is. AI does.

YOUR WEBSITE + YOUR BLOG

Your web developer is a prompt away.

RECEIPT · MARCOTTE.INK

Built and run with AI. No developer.

40+ pages

17 old posts moved

$0 hosting

Blog, free tools, talk pages, link-in-bio, brand kit. The llms.txt, schema and sitemap ship with every page.

A BLOG THAT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE AI

Talk Record 5 minutes on one customer question.

Draft AI turns it into a post in your voice.

Fix You check every fact, price and promise.

Ship It publishes and tells the search engines.

One real answer a week beats fifty AI posts. Your know-how is the content.

WHY NOW

AI went from answering questions to working a shift.

2023

Minutes

Answer a question. Draft one email.

EARLY 2025

~2 hours

Research a competitor’s pricing and write a one-page brief.

EARLY 2026

~12 hours

Audit every open order, flag what’s slipping, draft every follow-up, build the report.

How much work it can finish on its own. **Doubling about every 7 months.**

Two years ago it was an intern. Now it can run a department.

METR time-horizon research, 2025–2026 · length of task, in human time, AI finishes about half the time

HIRE 3

The Department

A team of them, run by a chief of staff: a second AI that checks the others' work and reports to you.

The staff the big shops have, at small-shop prices. You don't operate it. You direct it.

DEMO DATA

This was on my phone before I woke up.

Every call recorded, transcribed, and pulled apart: decisions, to-dos, who owes what. Every “by Friday” gets caught and dated.

I don’t have to remember. It remembers for me.

CHIEF OF STAFF · TUE 5:50 AM

Reorder at risk: Northside Youth Soccer #1124 ships Thursday. Art approved, untouched 4 days. First on today’s list.

2 quotes went stale overnight ($3,900). Follow-up drafts ready for your OK.

2 invoices past due ($2,340). Friendly reminder drafts ready.

Second assistant reviewed overnight work. Nothing else slipped.

The quote pile, solved.

REAL SHOP

SAME JOB DESCRIPTION, NOW AN AGENT

```
WHEN: a quote request comes in
DO: read it, build the quote in Printavo. Line
items, sizes grouped, imprints, art attached, due
date. Flag what's missing.
NEVER: set the price or send it. The team does
that.
```

BEFORE · 464-PIECE ORDER

Lands as a blank quote. **Quantity: 0.**

AFTER · SECONDS LATER

5 line items, sizes grouped, ship method, due date, tax-exempt form attached.

~90% of the quote written before a human touches it.

Same job description from Hire 1. It just doesn't wait for you anymore.

CHECK-IN · HANDS UP

Hands up if someone on your team used ChatGPT this week.

Keep it up if you're the one who told them to.

78% **of people using AI at work bring their own tools. Nobody asked the boss.**

Microsoft & LinkedIn Work Trend Index, 2024 · 31,000 people, 31 countries

THE TOOLBOX

Three great tools. You need one.

THE GPT BRAIN

OpenAI - ChatGPT

WHY Your desk employee. Drafts, files, spreadsheets, one-off jobs.

HOW Sign in with ChatGPT Plus or Pro. Point it at a folder.

THE CLAUDE BRAIN

Claude Code + Cowork

WHY Cowork runs the office: email, calendar, files. Code talks to my Printavo.

HOW Sign in with Claude Pro or Max.

THE HARNESS

Hermes

WHY My chief of staff. Open source, any brain, remembers everything.

HOW A $5-a-month server and a Telegram bot.

Your whole budget line: one $20-a-month plan to start, a $5 server later for the overnight employee.

NO THEORY. ASSIGNMENTS.

What do I actually do when I get home?

ChatGPT + Dot

1 Clear the quote pile with the front-office prompt

2 Export quotes, find everything idle 7+ days

3 Voice memo to SOP, one a week

Claude Cowork

1 Morning inbox sweep, replies drafted in your voice

2 Nudge anything waiting on approval 3+ days

3 Friday scorecard: sent, closed, stalling

Hermes

1 Text your shop from the press

2 The 5:50 AM brief, on a schedule

3 Reorder mining every Monday

Start typing tonight? ChatGPT. Live in your email? Cowork. Night shift? Hermes. Start with one.

BEYOND CHAT

Don’t just talk to it.
Have it build your tools.

SEE YOUR SHOP

Live dashboards

Stale quotes, the art queue, today’s jobs. On the shop TV.

NEVER RE-PROMPT

Channels with rules

Drop a file in #art-check and it’s checked against your specs. Every time.

PUT IT ON THE CLOCK

Cron jobs

“Run this every day at 5:50 AM.” That’s how my brief exists.

Ask once → Name it a skill → Give it a channel → Put it on the clock

You stop buying software and start describing it. Task, skill, habit, employee.

Same skill every time.

You write the job description.

HANDS UP

THE HARDEST JOB IN THE SHOP

Seps.

The job that lives in one person’s head. Inks, base, chokes, films: every one a judgment call.

By hand, a 5-screen sim job is often 2–4 hours. A lot of shops just send it out.

Hands up if you send your sims out. Keep it up if you’ve waited on your separator.



PUBLIC LAUNCH · LIVE TODAY

Six months ago I started building the sep tool I always wanted at the press.

The Separation Engine.

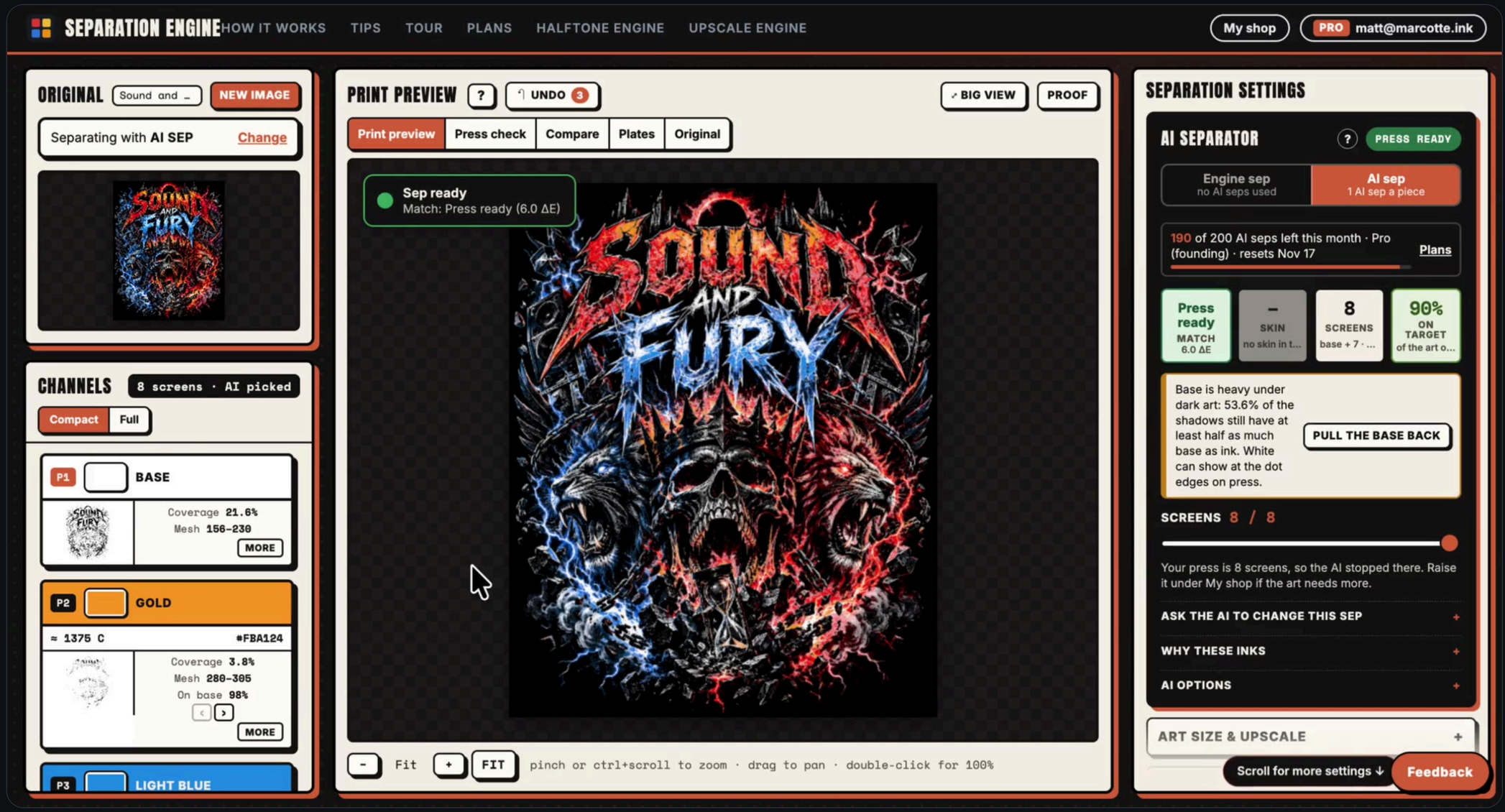
6 months
of building, breaking and rebuilding

4 processes
spot, sim, index and 4-color

~90 sec
for an AI sep. By hand: 2–4 hours.

Watch it sep. Real art, live tool.

AI SEP · MIDDLE SPED UP 6×

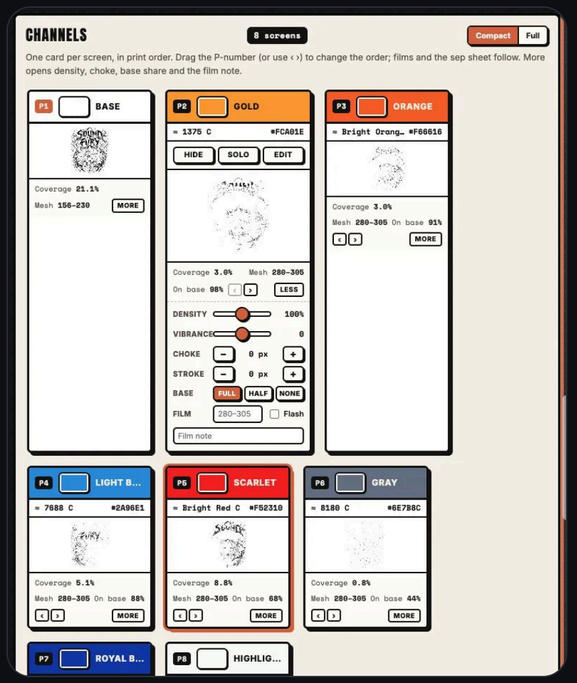


Art in. Films out.

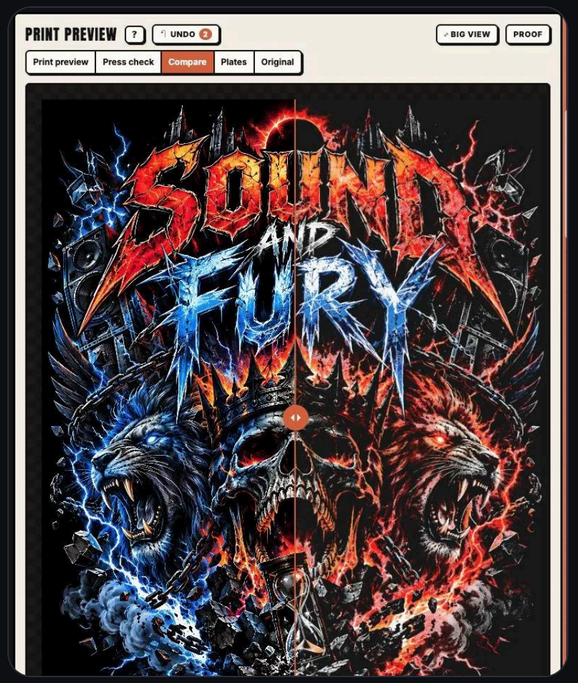
Real job · sim process · black shirt



YOUR ART



8 SCREENS, PRINT ORDER



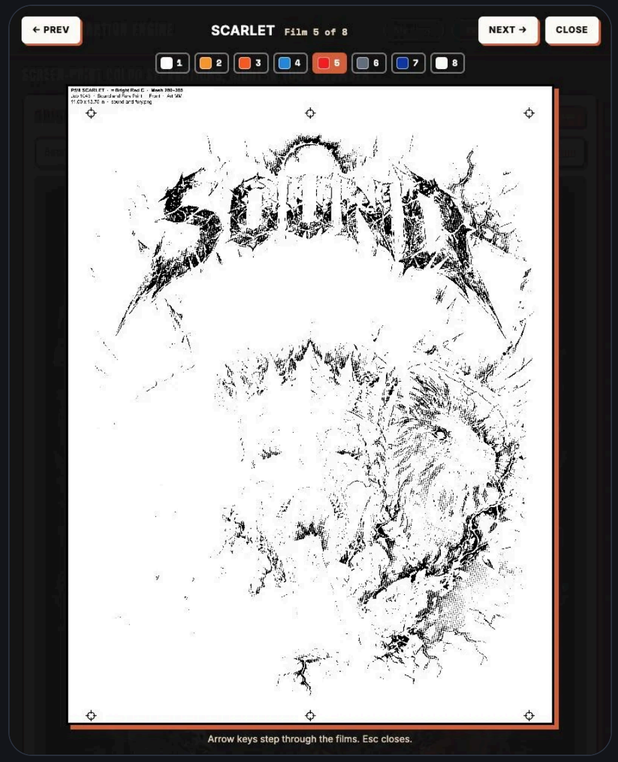
ART VS. PREDICTED PRINT

It picks the inks, builds the base, and checks its own print against your art, adding inks until they match.

Press check it before you burn a screen.



PRESS CHECK · HIT 4 OF 8



SCARLET · FILM 5 OF 8

FILMS

55 LPI · 22.5° · ellipse dot

Min dot, dot gain and speck cleanup set for the press.

EVERY PLATE

Coverage, mesh and choke, editable by hand.

OUT THE DOOR

Films with reg marks, PSD, and a sep sheet for the press.

WHAT IT ACTUALLY TOOK

AI wrote the code.
It can’t tell a good sep from a bad one.

THE JUDGMENT

A career at the press

When to go sim, how much base, where a choke saves the print. I taught it one bad film at a time.

THE REBUILD

Six months, one restart

v1 never printed great. Throwing it out was the hard call.

THEN → TODAY

125 updates

in 40 days, each one ripped on real art in spot, sim, index and 4-color.

Anyone can ask AI for a sep tool. Knowing what print-ready looks like is the product.

PUBLIC LAUNCH · LIVE RIGHT NOW

marcotte.ink/seps



SCAN TO TRY IT

7 days	Free trial. 2 AI seps, 5 Engine seps, downloads. No card.
$39/mo	Starter: 25 AI seps and 25 Engine seps a month.
$99/mo	Pro: 200 AI seps, unlimited Engine seps, the assistant.

Scan it now. Upload your art tonight, then watch it work.

What it cannot do, and should not

A B+ employee at almost everything. An A+ at nothing.

Your craft

It can’t run a press, burn a screen, or feel when a cure is off.

Your people

It doesn’t hire, coach, or hold anyone accountable. You do.

Customer trust

The relationship is the business. Earned at the counter, not generated.

Judgment

It’s confidently wrong. Know your trade so you can catch it.

Two rules: watch where customer and money data goes, and check every output before it reaches a customer.

YOUR PEOPLE

AI changes the job, not the headcount.

ROLE	LESS OF	MORE OF
Artist	Upscales, redraws, vectors	**Seps, approvals, the hard art**
Production manager	Chasing status	**Planning the week**
Owner	Building quotes	**Selling and pricing**
Customer service	The same 40 questions	**The 5 that need a human**

39% of core skills change by 2030. Be honest about who wants the new job.

World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Report 2025 · 1,000+ employers

THE TRAP I FELL INTO

This is a rabbit hole. Go in with a clock.

Automation time

Work you hate, work that loses you jobs. The quote pile. The follow-ups. Real hours back.

AI playtime

Polishing a tool nobody asked for. Fine as a hobby. Don't bill it to the shop.

WHERE I BURNED MONEY · 1

The top model on every task. Even email sorting. The invoice told me.

WHERE I BURNED MONEY · 2

A CRM I paid for most of a year and never used. AI does that job now.

The tool was never the bottleneck. ***You are.*** *Get good at describing a great job.*

It gets worse before it pays.

Expense phase · months 0–6 · Month 3: where most owners quit · Breakeven



8–10 mo to earn back my first ~$10k. Three years in, it’s paid for itself many times over. Month three nearly broke me too.

The big shops use AI to get a little faster.
You use it to field a staff you could never afford.

You didn’t open a shop to quote at 10 PM and miss every Saturday. AI is the first hire that takes the work no human was ever going to do for you.

YOUR ROCK THIS WEEK

Pick the one task you hate most. Don’t buy anything. **Write its job description for an AI, the way you’d brief a new hire, and run it once.**

Hands up if you’re in this week.

AI is not going to take your job. Somebody using it is.

Five shops told that customer no. The one who said yes just knew how to ask.

marcotte.ink/manifest

Every prompt from today, the job description template, the slides and the seps tool:

marcotte.ink/manifest

Demo customers and the morning brief are made-up data. Oklahoma Shirt Co. figures shared with permission.