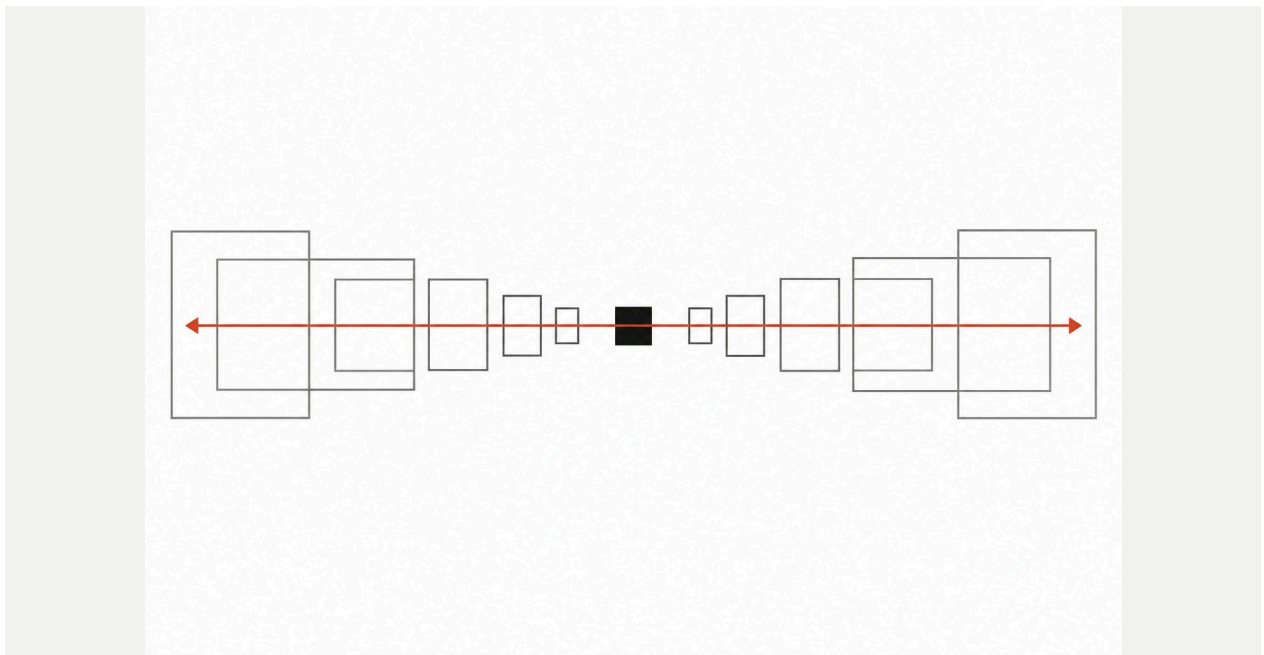


Strategic traps

The Illusion of Momentum

When AI makes everyone more capable, greater output can conceal a shrinking advantage. What remains defensible when everyone has the same firepower?

By Steve Attard · October 6, 2026 · 3 min read



The baseline rises for everyone.

An essay by Steve Attard

AI & human capability

IDEA IN BRIEF

Greater output can conceal a shrinking competitive advantage when everyone gains access to the same AI tools. As execution becomes easier, scale alone offers less protection. Use the tools while investing in what competitors cannot readily reproduce: domain trust, proprietary context, physical relationships, and owner judgment.

We are being handed the strongest tools in human history—and they are arriving on everyone's desk at the exact same moment.

The instinct is to celebrate the firepower. Software runs faster. Proposals take minutes instead of days. Small teams execute work that used to require entire departments. On paper, your business looks more capable than ever.

The paradox is that you can double your operational output and still lose ground. Because the same firepower that makes you faster also expands what everyone else can do against you.

Universal Firepower

For decades, simply being able to execute at scale was protection enough.

It took years of hiring, custom software, and heavy organizational muscle to deliver complex work. The sheer difficulty and cost of execution was your barrier to entry.

AI collapses that barrier overnight.

When foundation models can draft contracts, write code, parse unstructured data, and generate client proposals out of the box, execution stops being rare. A three-person competitor down the street doesn't need to build what you built over ten years—they use off-the-shelf models to bypass the build entirely.

You got stronger. But so did everyone else. And when the baseline moves for an entire market at once, your relative advantage doesn't expand.

It shrinks.

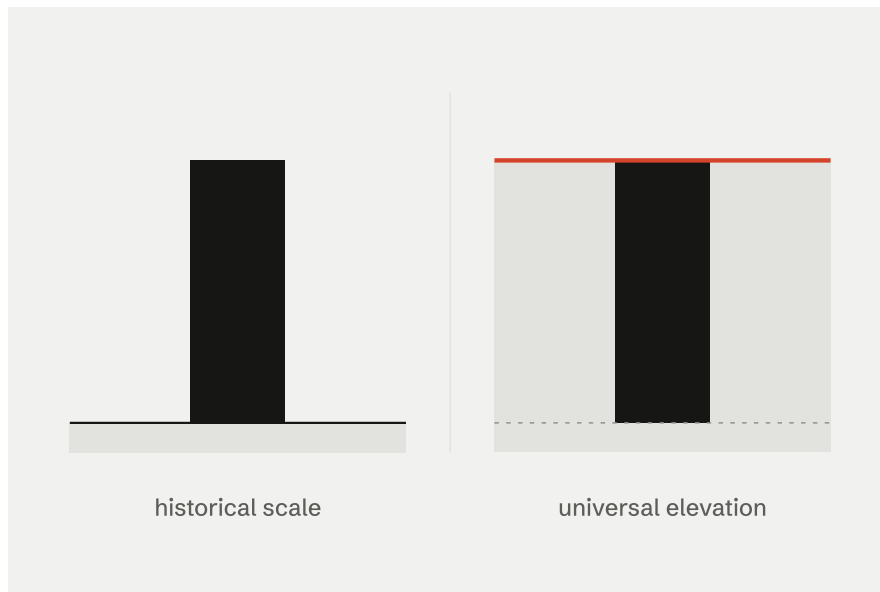


Fig. 2 Same structure. A higher floor.

Where Exposure Grows

When firepower becomes universal, scale can quietly turn from an asset into an anchor in three places:

1. The cost of attack collapses.

Competing with an established player used to require serious capital and headcount. Today, an agile rival can match your client-facing output, replicate your interfaces, and launch targeted campaigns for pennies on the dollar.

2. Internal friction becomes obvious.

If your organization needs three weeks and four sign-offs to ship what a lean team generates in an hour, your scale isn't protecting you. It's slowing you down.

3. Customer patience expires.

Once buyers experience immediate, friction-free responsiveness in their own lives, traditional turnaround times stop looking thorough. They look slow.

The opportunity in these tools is massive. But because the tools are universal, the risk is almost proportionately as great.

What Models Can't Synthesize

When everyone has access to the same intelligence tools, racing to adopt them doesn't build a moat. It just pays the price of admission.

Instead of asking, “*How do we make our team more capable with these tools?*” the sharper question for an owner-CEO is: “*What remains defensible when everyone has the same firepower?*”

The answer isn’t in software or routine execution. Advantage moves back to what cannot be generated:

- **Irreplaceable domain trust.** Relationships backed by personal accountability and shared risk.
- **Proprietary context.** Deep operational data and institutional memory that models can’t scrape.
- **Physical and distribution gravity.** Supply chains, local presence, and real-world relationships that stay physical regardless of digital speed.
- **Owner judgment.** The willingness to commit capital and carry real downside when answers are cheap, but consequences remain expensive.

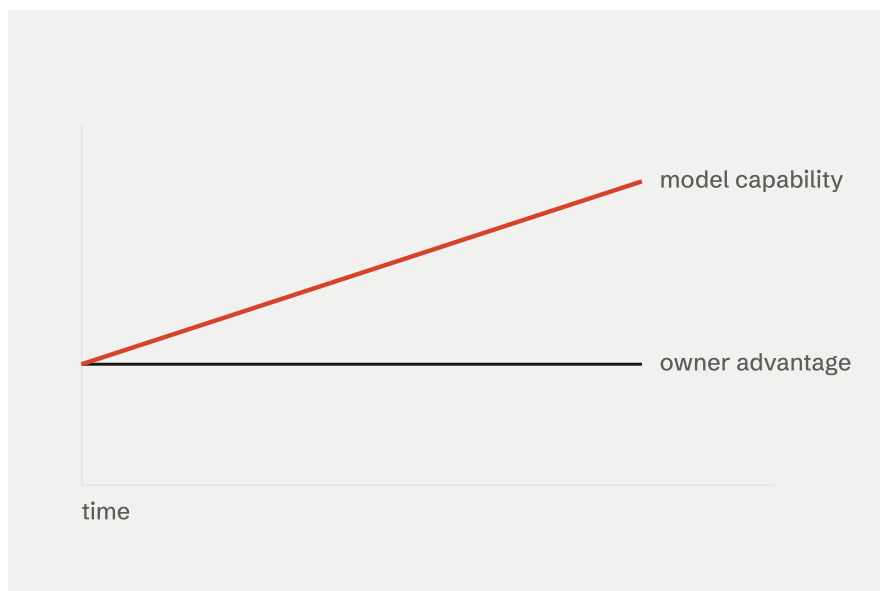


Fig. 3 Capability rises. Owner advantage stays flat.

The goal isn’t to hold back on adopting these tools. You use them aggressively just to stay in the game.

The goal is recognizing that when firepower is universal, tool capability is merely the baseline—and real advantage belongs to what you own that models cannot synthesize.



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