



Rural Broadband's AI Advantage: Smaller, Faster, Smarter

Summary Notes from the NTCA AI Summit

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Small Size Is Your Competitive Weapon**

Rural broadband providers can deploy AI faster than Fortune 500 companies spending millions on the same technology. Your organizational simplicity and lack of legacy systems create conditions where frontier AI capabilities (available for \$20-100 per month) give you the same tools as larger enterprises, but without the complexity barriers that keep large organizations “a year behind” consumers in AI adoption.

“This isn’t like GPS. This isn’t like the internet, where it started in military, and then it went to government, and then it went to very large organizations, and then eventually it trickled down to us SMBs. From day one, we have the ability to take advantage of all that this technology brings.”

Justin Massa, Remix Partners (Keynote / General Session)

- 2 Start With Content, Scale to Customer Experience**

Content creation emerged as the safest, highest-value entry point: social media posts, customer communications, and documentation require minimal data exposure while building the prompt engineering skills needed for advanced applications. As you master AI-assisted content, reinvest efficiency gains into staff training and customer-facing personalized experiences—your real competitive advantage over competitors.

“71% of people think that their employer should teach them how to use AI. Can small businesses and rural communities do that today?”

Angie Cooper, Heartland Forward (AI in Rural Spaces / General Session)

- 3 Build Your Community of Practice Now**

No frontier AI lab (Anthropic, DeepMind, X.ai, OpenAI, etc.) is focused on small and medium sized businesses, so peer learning must be your primary knowledge source. The NTCA member network of non-competitive partners enables sharing use cases, prompt libraries, and implementation strategies that would be impossible among competitors. Find ways to work together: create shared resources, document lessons learned, and coordinate experiments to accelerate collective progress.

“With AI, you don’t need that many people. What you need is folks with deep domain knowledge and the grit and innovative ideas to solve a problem.”

Matt Dunne, Center on Rural Innovation (AI in Rural Spaces / General Session)



4 Govern Data, Then Innovate

Security and privacy concerns are the primary constraints on adoption velocity. Successful providers are exploring hybrid approaches: local model hosting for sensitive data, cloud-based tools for general content, and curated knowledge bases that control exactly what AI can access. Establish clear governance practices before scaling deployment, but don't let the pursuit of perfect policy delay active learning.

“Data is simultaneously the number one enabler and inhibitor of AI projects right now. So, it is your gold, it is your oil. It’s your most valuable asset, but at the same time, nobody was prepared data-wise for AI... get your data protected accordingly so you can actually go make the most out of that asset.”

Justin Mescher, ePlus Technology (AI Governance Panel / Operations Track)

5 Master the Prompt, Multiply the Impact

Quality AI outputs require prompt engineering as a distinct skill—treating models as collaborators that need context, role definition, examples, and format specifications. Organizations building reusable prompt templates (as Justin Massa calls a “technique”) for common tasks see dramatically better results than those using AI like a search engine.

“If you start with great data and have a good recipe... you will create magic on a reliable basis, it will be less work, and it will be so much faster for you to get great results out of AI.”

Christopher S. Penn, Trust Insights (Making Media Reliably with AI / Marketing Track)

NEXT STEPS

Access all session recordings in the NTCA AI Summit Video Gallery (available at the top of the Lobby page) to explore the content from tracks you did not attend or revisit the sessions that warrant a second viewing. Most importantly: if you relate to being at “Stage 2” (experimenting with AI, but not yet fully integrated), know that your company is not behind—you are exactly where most other providers are, with the perfect opportunity to learn collaboratively and move forward together.

“I would be remiss if I did not say to this audience: don’t stop building... go out and use AI... and talk to your state lawmakers... you are viewed as trusted resources.”

Kathryn de Wit, Pew Charitable Trusts (AI in Rural Spaces / General Session)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM REMIX PARTNERS

Generative AI x Differentiation Framework

	Low AI Impact Risk	High AI Impact Risk
High Strategic Differentiation	augment <i>combine human and machine; invest in upskilling</i>	transform <i>augment or automate?</i>
Low Strategic Differentiation	maintain <i>business as usual, but scan the horizon</i>	automate <i>adopt rapidly to reduce costs and free up resources</i>

Techniques, Jigs, and Tools for AI Implementation

technique	jig	tool
quick, in the browser solution <i>example: a shared prompt library</i>	lightweight, scrappy, shareable solution <i>examples: Gems, Custom GPTs, or Skills; Lovable, Replit, or Opal prototypes; Clay.com or Lindy workflows</i>	full-fledged, fully implemented solution <i>examples: Jasper, wide-reaching agentic AI, full custom software</i>
low cost, fast scales poorly, harder to govern		longer, expensive scalable, governable
now-term capabilities to amplify the value of generative AI		near-term investments to capture ROI at scale

Generative AI Opportunity “MadLib”

“To **[augment / transform / automate]** our capability to _____, let’s explore a **[short description of concept]**. As a technique this could be _____, as a jig this could be _____, as a tool this could be _____. If it works, it will **[impact]**.”