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 IT & Computing

European SMEs Accelerate AI Adoption Amid Economic Uncertainty - But Workforce Readiness Lags Behind

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- 75% of SME owners now trust AI more than they did a year ago
- Despite widespread uptake, 55% of leaders remain concerned that their business is not utilising AI as much as it could be
- Nearly half (43%) of SME leaders still need clearer guidance on how to adopt and use AI securely

European small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are rapidly integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into their operations, driven by economic pressures, competitive demands, and the promise of greater productivity. However, new research from Sharp Europe, a leading provider of business technology products and services, reveals that while 75% of SME owners now trust AI more than they did a year ago, concerns remain about the workforce's ability to keep up.

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reason for accelerating AI use, many CEOs feel the pressure to keep pace with competitors already leveraging these technologies. However, despite widespread uptake, 55% of leaders remain concerned that their business is not utilising AI as much, or as effectively, as it could be.

“AI has moved from the back office to the core of how SMEs work, compete, and grow,” says Roland Singer, Vice President of IT Services, Sharp Europe. “Our research shows we’ve reached a turning point - AI is no longer a ‘nice to have.’ Businesses are asking not if they should use it, but how fast and how effectively they can scale it.”

A significant number of SME owners (64%) report that AI is fully embedded in their business, with over half (51%) believing AI will open more opportunities for employees to develop new skills. However, employee anxiety persists on the use of AI at work, with 35% of leaders saying staff are worried about their lack of tech skills, and 34% reporting a lack of trust in AI-generated outputs. Ethical concerns are also prevalent, with a third (33%) believing employees fear being seen as lazy or “cheating” by using AI.

To address these challenges, 39% of SMEs have trained all employees on AI tools. Additionally, 36% have secured their data for AI integration, and 33% have invested in new licences to support ongoing use.

“AI is creating exciting opportunities for SMEs, but it’s also creating new risks, especially when tools are adopted without clear policies or oversight,” added Singer. “The most successful SMEs will be the ones that balance innovation with responsibility, ensuring AI is used in a way that supports both business growth and employee development.”

Despite this adoption and training, nearly half (43%) of SME leaders say they still need clearer guidance on how to adopt and use AI efficiently and securely.

Sharp Europe helps businesses be more secure when using AI by providing a tailored approach that advises organisations on key AI business decisions. This focuses on securing data for AI integration, supporting the creation and implementation of company-wide AI policies, and providing employee training to ensure safe and effective use of AI tools.

Knowing that its customers are operating in a rapidly changing world, Sharp has recently [unveiled a new brand proposition, the ‘one Sharp’ Digital Experience](#). As the customer’s technology partner, this unifies

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cybersecurity. The new proposition also signals Sharp's commitment to helping organisations enhance performance and unlock new opportunities, as a [trusted technology partner for businesses of all sizes](#).

For further insights and advice on AI adoption for SMEs, please visit: <https://www.sharp.eu/it-services/it-solutions/copilot-readiness-assessment>

Notes to editors

Research

The research was conducted by Censuswide from 17 June 2025 – 25 June 2025 and responded to by 2,500 business owners in companies with 50-250 employees across Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK.

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Headquartered in London, Sharp Europe work with customers in the private and public sectors, with a portfolio ranging from printers and advanced display technologies, through to IT Services and collaboration platforms like our Synappx Services.

Part of Sharp Corporation, which has over 39,000 employees worldwide, Sharp Europe has more than 700 IT practitioners supporting our European customers, offices in 17 countries and four manufacturing facilities across Europe.

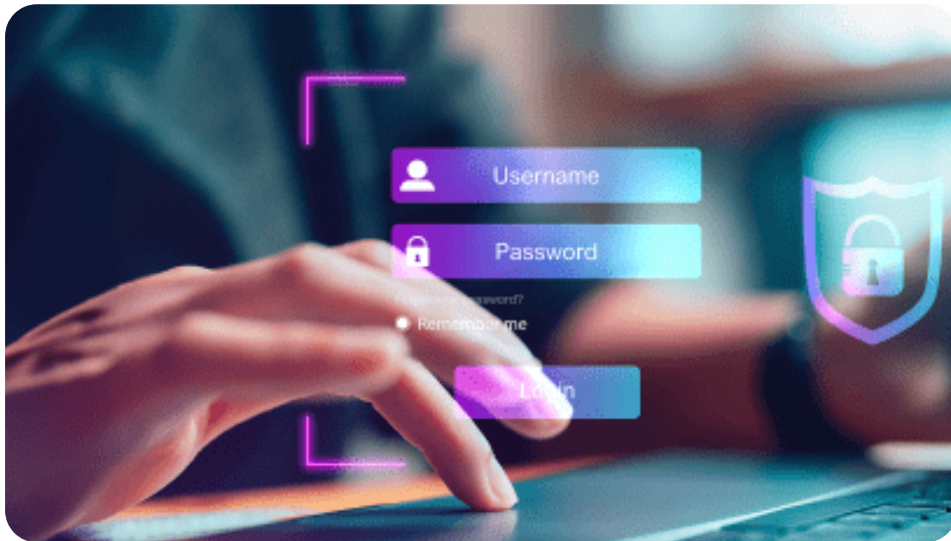
As part of Sharp Corporation, Sharp Europe is investing and leading the industry in new areas of technology. As our customers' needs shift, we are the perfect partner to connect them to the technology that will drive their business forward.

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