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To: Tor D. Wager

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Almost Timely News : Unleash the Power of AI With The Command Line (2025-12- 28)

In the beginning...

CHRISTOPHER S. PENN

DEC 28



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What's On My Mind: Unleash the Power of AI With The Command Line

To close out 2025, let's end the year on a deep dive into something technical and arcane: the command line. More than a few folks commented after last week's newsletter that the bit about the command line stood out, so I figured I'd dig in a bit this week.

I will warn that this issue is not going to be everyone's cup of tea. It is more technical. It is practical and useful, but there are parts I'm going to skim over because we could spend hours and hours just talking about the command line and that's probably not the best use of our time today.

Understanding the command line and its utilities is the difference between AI being a single use utility - still powerful to be clear - and AI becoming an engine of productivity that you've never seen before.

Part 0: Disclaimers, Disclosures, and Warnings

This issue of the newsletter is more technical than most and will focus on the use of command line utilities and other relatively technical pieces of software. I make absolutely, positively no warranties that following the instructions or ideas in this newsletter are safe. You might very well erase your computer or light it on fire, or cause it to only sing "It's a Small World" on repeat in perpetuity. Trying any of the ideas in this newsletter is at your own, sole risk.

I do not offer any form of technical support or guidance or instructions for any consequences that might result from this newsletter.

Additionally, if you're going to do this on a work computer, please consult with your IT or technical department before you go installing pieces of software based on the advice of someone from the internet.

Part 1: Why The Command Line

To understand this point, let's talk about why AI needs the command line. In a word, it's all about execution. A service like ChatGPT or Gemini lives inside your browser. That's its operating environment, and while AI manufacturers have made great strides in 2025 connecting these browser-based environments to things we care about, like our email or our office software, the reality is that they're still in little fishbowls.

If we want to unlock the power of AI, we need to do so by connecting it to as many systems as possible. There's no place more connected to the things we care about than our own computers. On our computers are our email, our apps, our documents, our photo libraries. Everything of note lives on our computers.

And for the most part, all of that is disconnected from AI tools. Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini can't see the contents of those folders on our machines, not from our web browsers.

But put inside an environment like Claude Code, Gemini Code Assist, OpenAI Codex, etc. and suddenly the AI models have the ability to see what's on our computers (when we give them permission to do so). That's a really important point. You have to give permission for AI to see stuff on your computer. It is not able to do that by default.

Even more important, they can create new tools for themselves to assist themselves in working with what's on our computers and with what's in the cloud. That's why the command line is so vitally important to our leveling up our AI skills. We are letting AI build its own tools to get even more done.

Part 2: What is the Command Line

The command line is the original operating system of computers from as far back as the 1950s. It is a text-based interface where you navigate your computer and run software from the keyboard. There's no graphical user interface, no mouse, no anything, just a little box that you type in (sound

familiar?). Those of you with a fair amount of grey in your hair will remember that computers used to operate this way all the time; back in the 1980s, most computers used MS-DOS or ProDOS, and you did everything from the keyboard.

I won't go into a history of computing here, except to say that the reason the command line is still relevant is because it is a text-based interface. Text based interface means that generative AI tools can read and write as though they were the ones doing the typing - and that makes all the difference in the world. They speak that language fluently.

Depending on the computer you're using, you get to the command line in a couple of different ways. On Windows computers, you go to your Start Menu and type cmd in the search box to find the Command Prompt. On Macs, you go into your Applications folder, then the Utilities folder, and find the app called Terminal. Both bring you into the arcane world of the command line with something that looks like this:



As an aside, if you want an in-depth, highly entertaining read about the history of the command line, Neal Stephenson (of Snow Crash and Cryptonomicon fame) wrote an excellent book about it that's free from Stanford called [In the Beginning Was The Command Line](#), and I highly recommend it.

Once you've found the command line, then you're ready to start using it. One of the most important paradigms of early computing, to save precious memory and space, was that computer applications typically did one small thing very well. This is especially true of Unix-based systems, of which MacOS is a direct descendant.

For example, built into every Unix-like system is a small program called wc.

wc does exactly one thing: counts words. Give it a file and a command, and it will count the number of words in that file. That's it. That's all it does. The reason for this is that in the early days of computing, you didn't want large monolithic pieces of software that occupied all the system memory to try and be everything to everyone. Instead you built applications that did one thing well in as little space as possible.

If you've used generative AI even casually, you know that it can't count words well. It's really bad at it. It's bad at math in general, but even something as simple as counting words eludes it a fair amount of the time. And there's the beauty of using AI from the command line: we give it access to utilities that make up for its gaps and flaws.

Part 3: An Extremely Brief and Hilariously Incomplete Tour

Before we start talking about how AI can use the command line, we should probably spend a tiny bit of time talking about how the human can use the command line. Which version of Windows or Mac OS/Linux you're using will dictate what commands are available.

On Windows machines, some very common commands are:

- dir: tells you what files are in the current folder
- cd: short for change directory, allows you to change folders
- mkdir: short for make directory, creates a new folder
- move: moves a file to a new location
- copy: copies a file or files
- del: deletes a file or files
- cls: clears the command line window

On Macs and Linux, those same commands are:

- pwd: short for print working directory, tells you what folder you're in
- ls: short for list, tells you what files are in the current folder
- mkdir: same as Windows
- mv: short for move, moves a file to a new location
- cp: short for copy, copies a file or files
- rm: short for remove, deletes a file or files
- clear: clears the command line window

You can navigate around your entire computer just using text commands.

While not necessarily the most convenient for us humans, you can see how a large language model that's skilled at generating text could easily find its way around.

Executing commands is just as simple. If you know the application's name - like the word count app - then you invoke it with that on the command line, like this:

Wc

Part 4: Setting Up Command Line AI

Now that you know what the command line is, our first step is to install package management. Package management is the complex term for a piece of software that helps install other pieces of software. On Windows, this is the [Chocolatey project](#). On MacOS, this is [Homebrew](#). On Linux, this is either apt or yum, and depending on the flavor of Linux you have installed, a package manager is usually included.

Your first task is to install the appropriate package manager for your system if you don't have one already. Once you've got that done, make note of it so that you can talk to your generative AI tool of choice about it.

I recommend installing a handful of incredibly powerful utilities that will help

you make the most of generative AI's capabilities and your system:

- Python 3.12/3.13
- Node.js and npm

These two systems make up almost all the different utilities and capabilities you'd want your AI assistants to have access to. On Chocolatey, the install commands look like this, typed into the command line.

```
choco install nodejs python313
```

On Homebrew, they look like this:

```
brew install nodejs python@3.13
```

Once those are installed, you're then ready to install the AI coding tool of your choice, depending on what services you pay for.

The major AI coding tools are:

- OpenAI Codex, powered by GPT-5.2
- Claude Code, powered by Claude Opal and Sonnet 4.5
- Gemini CLI, powered by Gemini 3

All these tools can be installed from the command line. Choose the one that matches your paying subscription - if you pay for ChatGPT, use Codex. If you pay for Gemini, use Gemini CLI. If you pay for Claude, use Claude Code.

If you installed Node and Python, you can now install each like this, from the command line:

- Codex: npm i -g @openai/codex
- Claude: npm install -g @anthropic-ai/clause-code
- Gemini: npm install -g @google/gemini-cli

Now you've got your AI tools installed on the command line, ready to use.

Part 5: Command Line AI

Command line AI is very similar to browser-based AI at first, but it quickly becomes apparent that the coding tools are capable of significantly more. They act more autonomously and can do longer, more complex tasks than their browser-based incarnations.

Let's now look at a very simple example of how the command line is different than the browser version.

First, start a new folder somewhere you keep your documents. Call it blogpost or something equally mundane. Then open your command line and using the commands from part 3, find your way to that folder. It'll probably look something like this:

```
cd /users/cspenn/documents/blogpost
```

(this will vary based on whether you're on a Mac, Windows, or Linux)

Once you've gotten to the correct folder, start your AI coding tool of choice by typing its startup command - codex, gemini, or claude.

We'll start with a stupid prompt, something that's guaranteed to create slop, but shows the power of the command line:

You're a CMI-award winning content marketer. Use your web search tools to identify current content marketing trends in late 2025, then reflect and

think about new, different content marketing trends for 2026. Write your notes and observations to trends.txt After you think and plan, write a 500 word blog post about your forecasted top 5 new content marketing trends to blog2026.txt. Use the word count tool for accurate word counts, +/- 15 words. Homebrew is installed if you need additional tools.

What you see here is a sloppy prompt on purpose. There are two things that make command line AI far more powerful in this example. The first is that because the AI model has access to the file system, it can read and write files.

One of the biggest challenges with generative AI is that, by design, AI models have no memory. Every chat is like starting fresh. When AI has access to the file system, however, it can take notes, it can write documents, and, critically, it can read documents it's written in the past. This allows it to have a persistent memory (within the limits of its short-term memory, or context window).

Second, you can see a couple examples of tool handling here. First, I directed it to use its web search tools. All the code-based AI models can still search the web. Second, I instructed it to use the command line word count tool to accurately count the number of words in its blog post. The AI should be smart enough to choose the appropriate tool depending on your operating system and environment.

Now, what comes out of this will be kind of messy. It'll not be great. So in the next step, let's add some polish to it. Create a new folder in the blog post folder. We'll call it docs. Inside here, if you have one, create a simple text file using any plain text editor called writingstyle.txt, and copy/paste your writing style analysis into the file.

Go back to the command line, and in the same conversation, copy paste this prompt:

Using the writing style in docs/writingstyle.txt, update the blog post in blog2026.txt to adhere strictly to the writing style. Make all necessary changes, then check the word count with the word count tool to keep the post at 500 words, +/- 15 words.

What you'll see is the AI coding tool perform these steps, applying your writing style to the document.

Now, let's kick it up a notch with this prompt, in the same conversation thread:

Next, based on each blog post, create a corresponding infographic in HTML and CSS in Bento style that summarizes the blog post's key points. Use Google fonts, particularly the Barlow font family, and use pastel calming colors. Be sure to use the Bento layout and capture the most important points. Aim for relatively few words on the infographic. Just enough to communicate just enough to communicate the point clearly and concisely.

We've now gone from reading and writing single files to doing files in batches.

It should be a very small leap of the imagination to think about how you could use multiple input files, like ideal customer profiles, etc. as well as generate multiple output files. Because these are coding tools at their heart, they're also capable of generating more than just plain text. They can create nearly anything code-based you might want - infographics in HTML, interactives, actual software, etc.

Here's an example:

Next, based on each blog post, create a corresponding infographic in HTML and CSS (with Tailwind) in Bento style that summarizes the blog post's key points. Use Google fonts, particularly the Barlow font family, and use pastel calming colors. Be sure to use the Bento layout and capture the most important points. Aim for relatively few words on the

infographic. Just enough to communicate the point clearly and concisely. Name each infographic after the blog post including the number. Store the infographics in the output folder as HTML files with embedded CSS.

Here's one last trick to really unlock the power of the command line. Create a new file in your blogpost directory called recipe.txt. Copy nad paste all the prompts I've listed in this newsletter so far into that recipe file, in order. Then save it.

Start a new chat in the coding tool, and give it this simple instruction:

Strictly follow the recipe in recipe.txt

That's it. The AI coding agents will do the rest.

Part 6: Wrapping Up

You can see where this goes, yes? Anything that your computer can access, these tools - with your permission - can access as well. Want to bring in your email? Have them write a connector to your email. Want to post updates to your CRM? Have them write a connector to your CRM. Want to generate a thousand ideas at a time? Have them crank out ideas in batches.

Literally anything you could ask for, if it's within the capabiliites of a large language model, these tools can do at a far greater scale than the consumer web interface you've been using. The possibilities are as unlimited as the AI itself is - limited only to your imagination and your vocabulary.

These tools are the most primitive they'll ever be today. Each day from here on, they'll get better and better, more capable, smarter, able to connect to more systems, able to generate nearly anything you could want. The coding tools are so proficient now that senior coders at big labs are simply handing off entire coding tasks to AI, simply supervising the work and offering their inputs.

The other day, I was talking to a client about their frustrations with a piece of commercial software they were struggling with, its lack of customization. I said, unironically, that they should consider simply making their own instead. It's within their reach and the reach of everyone that has a basic paid AI subscription.

As we wind down 2025 and move into 2026, that's the biggest secret of all, the biggest "unlock" as the LinkedIn bros love to say: if it's software or something digital, literally anything is within your ability to ask AI to create. Yes, there are best practices, gotchas, and challenges. Yes, it won't get it right the first few times. But if you're willing to learn and persist, whatever you want to create, you can manifest into the world with AI, done exactly the way you want it, truly customized to you - and very possibly, not costing you a dime.

If you want an even bigger level up, take this entire newsletter and drag it into the AI tool of your choice and have it walk you through the steps needed to implement everything that we've talked about today.

I wish you a safe, happy, healthy, and prosperous 2026. And I hope that you use AI in all of its incarnations to help you achieve those four things.

How Was This Issue?

Rate this week's newsletter issue with a single click/tap. Your feedback over time helps me figure out what content to create for you.

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Here's The Unsubscribe

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to the unsubscribe.

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Advertisement: The Unofficial LinkedIn Algorithm Guide

If you're wondering whether the LinkedIn 'algorithm' has changed, the entire system has changed.

I refreshed the Trust Insights Unofficial LinkedIn Algorithm Guide with the latest technical papers, blog posts, and data from LinkedIn Engineering.

The big news is that not only has the system changed since our last version of the paper (back in May), it's changed MASSIVELY. It behaves very differently now because there's all new technology under the hood that's very clever but focuses much more heavily on relevance than recency, courtesy of a custom-tuned LLM under the hood.

In the updated guide, you'll learn what the system is, how it works, and most important, what you should do with your profile, content, and engagement to align with the technical aspects of the system, derived from LinkedIn's own engineering content.

 **Here's where to get it, free of financial cost (but with a form fill)**

12 Days of AI Use Cases

The annual series has debuted on the Trust Insights blog!

- [12 Days of AI Use Cases Day 1: Documentation Knowledge Blocks](#)
- [12 Days of AI Use Cases Day 2: Sales Lead Scoring](#)
- [12 Days of AI Use Cases Day 3: Product Feedback](#)
- [12 Days of AI Use Cases Day 4: Landing Page Optimization](#)
- [12 Days of AI Use Cases Day 5: Quarterly Reviews](#)
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- [12 Days of AI Use Cases Day 10: Press Coverage Analysis](#)
- [12 Days of AI Use Cases Day 11: Google Ad Campaigns](#)
- [12 Days of AI Use Cases Day 12: Generating a Holiday Song](#)

ICYMI: In Case You Missed It

Here's content from the last week in case things fell through the cracks:

- [Never Run Out of LinkedIn Content Ideas Again: A Simple AI-Powered Strategy](#)

- [How to Stand Out When Everyone Has AI in Their Toolbox](#)
- [Discover Why MarketingProfs B2B Forum Feels Like Home for Marketing Professionals](#)
- [Why Passive Voice Kills Clarity and How AI Can Save Your Writing](#)
- [Unlocking Disney-Level Event Success: Why MAICON's Small Touches Create Magic](#)
- [Almost Timely News: 🎥 How to Update Old Content With AI \(2025-12-07\)](#)
- [In-Ear Insights: 2025 Year In Review](#)
- [INBOX INSIGHTS, December 17, 2025: What We Learned About AI, Humanity at Risk](#)
- [So What? How to make your own 2025 wrap-up](#)

On The Tubes

Here's what debuted on my YouTube channel this week:

- [You Ask, I Answer: Is AI AGI Imminent?](#)
- [You Ask, I Answer: How to Bypass AI Censorship?](#)
- [You Ask, I Answer: What's the Best AI Model?](#)
- [Almost Timely News: 🎥 Where AI is Going in 2026 \(2025-12-21\)](#)

Skill Up With Classes

These are just a few of the classes I have available over at the Trust Insights website that you can take.

Premium

- [🧭 New! The AI-Ready Strategist](#)
- [💥 Generative AI Use Cases for Marketers](#)

-  [Mastering Prompt Engineering for Marketers](#)
-  [Generative AI for Marketers](#)
-  [Google Analytics 4 for Marketers](#)
-  [Google Search Console for Marketers](#) ( just updated with AI SEO stuff! 

Free

-  [New! From Text to Video in Seconds, a session on AI video generation!](#)
- [Never Think Alone: How AI Has Changed Marketing Forever \(AMA 2025\)](#)
- [Generative AI for Tourism and Destination Marketing](#)
- [Powering Up Your LinkedIn Profile \(For Job Hunters\) 2023 Edition](#)
- [Building the Data-Driven, AI-Powered Customer Journey for Retail and Ecommerce, 2024 Edition](#)
- [The Marketing Singularity: How Generative AI Means the End of Marketing As We Knew It](#)

Advertisement: New AI Book!

In [Almost Timeless](#), generative AI expert Christopher Penn provides the definitive playbook. Drawing on 18 months of in-the-trenches work and insights from thousands of real-world questions, Penn distills the noise into 48 foundational principles—durable mental models that give you a more permanent, strategic understanding of this transformative technology.

In this book, you will learn to:

- **Master the Machine:** Finally understand why AI acts like a “brilliant but forgetful intern” and turn its quirks into your greatest strength.

- **Deploy the Playbook:** Move from theory to practice with frameworks for driving real, measurable business value with AI.
- **Secure Your Human Advantage:** Discover why your creativity, judgment, and ethics are more valuable than ever—and how to leverage them to win.

Stop feeling overwhelmed. Start leading with confidence. By the time you finish Almost Timeless, you won't just know what to do; you will understand why you are doing it. And in an age of constant change, that understanding is the only real competitive advantage.

 **Order your copy of Almost Timeless: 48 Foundation Principles of Generative AI today!**

Advertisement: New AI Strategy Course

Almost every AI course is the same, conceptually. They show you how to prompt, how to set things up - the cooking equivalents of how to use a blender or how to cook a dish. These are foundation skills, and while they're good and important, you know what's missing from all of them? How to run a restaurant successfully. That's the big miss. We're so focused on the how that we completely lose sight of the why and the what.

This is why our new course, the AI-Ready Strategist, is different. It's not a collection of prompting techniques or a set of recipes; it's about why we do things with AI. AI strategy has nothing to do with prompting or the shiny object of the day — it has everything to do with extracting value from AI and avoiding preventable disasters. This course is for everyone in a decision-making capacity because it answers the questions almost every AI hype artist ignores: Why are you even considering AI in the first place? What will you do with it? If your AI strategy is the equivalent of obsessing over blenders while your steakhouse goes out of business, this is the course to get you back on course.

 **Take the course now!**

How to Stay in Touch

Let's make sure we're connected in the places it suits you best. Here's where you can find different content:

- My blog - daily videos, blog posts, and podcast episodes
- My YouTube channel - daily videos, conference talks, and all things video
- My company, Trust Insights - marketing analytics help
- My podcast, Marketing over Coffee - weekly episodes of what's worth noting in marketing
- My second podcast, In-Ear Insights - the Trust Insights weekly podcast focused on data and analytics
- On Bluesky - random personal stuff and chaos
- On LinkedIn - daily videos and news
- On Instagram - personal photos and travels
- My free Slack discussion forum, Analytics for Marketers - open conversations about marketing and analytics

Listen to my theme song as a new single:

- Apple Music
- Spotify
- YouTube

Advertisement: Ukraine Humanitarian Fund

The war to free Ukraine continues. If you'd like to support humanitarian

efforts in Ukraine, the Ukrainian government has set up a special portal, United24, to help make contributing easy. The effort to free Ukraine from Russia's illegal invasion needs your ongoing support.

 [Donate today to the Ukraine Humanitarian Relief Fund »](#)

Events I'll Be At

Here are the public events where I'm speaking and attending. Say hi if you're at an event also:

- Tourism Industry Association of Alberta, Edmonton, February 2026
- Social Media Marketing World, Anaheim, April 2026

There are also private events that aren't open to the public.

If you're an event organizer, let me help your event shine. [Visit my speaking page for more details.](#)

Can't be at an event? Stop by my private Slack group instead, [Analytics for Marketers.](#)

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Thank You

Thanks for subscribing and reading this far. I appreciate it. As always, thank you for your support, your attention, and your kindness.

See you next week,

Christopher S. Penn

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