Taste: Turning Vibe into Assets in the AI Age

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First Edition: 2026

Published by: Finxter
Website: https://blog.finxter.com/ai/

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For those who choose leverage over legacy

Chapter 1: From Scale to Taste: How AI Levels the Playing Field

For a long time, the internet rewarded the same kinds of advantage that had always mattered in business. More money helped. Better credentials helped. More employees helped. Access helped. Process helped. If you wanted to build something serious, you usually needed a team, time, and enough structure to survive the long stretch between idea and execution.

The web changed distribution. It did not fully change who got to create at scale.

A founder with venture backing could hire engineers, designers, marketers, and operators. A media company could staff editors and producers. A software firm could run a roadmap, a sprint cycle, a release calendar, and a sales motion. The internet lowered some costs, but in practice it still favored organizations that could coordinate labor and endure friction. Even the mythology of the internet hero often hid the machinery behind the curtain. The solo creator had contractors. The indie founder eventually hired. The breakout newsletter became a media business. The fast startup became a company.

That model is not gone. Big companies still matter. Capital still matters. Deep expertise still matters. But something important has shifted underneath them. AI is not just helping people work faster inside the old structure. It is changing who can produce leverage before the structure even exists.

That is the real story.

Most discussion of AI still starts from a narrow frame. How much time can it save? How many tasks can it automate? How many support tickets can it answer? How many emails can it draft? This framing is understandable because productivity is easy to measure and easy to sell. If a tool helps a team do the same work with fewer hours, the benefit is visible. Managers can budget around it. Procurement can justify it. Consultants can make slides about it.

But productivity is the least interesting version of the change.

The more important shift is that AI compresses the distance between thought and artifact. A person with an idea can now get to a mockup, a product, a prototype, a landing page, a workflow, a sales asset, a research summary, or even a functioning piece of software with far less institutional support than before. The bottleneck is moving. In many domains, the hard part is no longer access to labor. The hard part is knowing what should exist, what people will respond to, what quality feels like, what to cut, what to emphasize, and what to ship now rather than six months from now.

In other words, the advantage is shifting toward taste.

That word can sound frivolous if you hear it the wrong way. It can sound like aesthetics for people who do not want to talk about substance. It can sound like fashion, vibes, branding, or a soft skill you mention when you cannot explain a real edge. In practice, taste is much harder and much more useful than that.

Taste is judgment under conditions where there is too much possibility.

It is the ability to distinguish the generic from the specific, the clumsy from the clean, the merely competent from the compelling. It is knowing what not to build. It is sensing when a product is one feature too busy, one click too slow, one joke too eager, one headline too broad, one price point too timid, one prompt too vague. It is the habit of seeing where quality actually lives.

Taste is not enough on its own. Taste without execution becomes commentary. Taste without domain knowledge becomes imitation. Taste without speed becomes regret. But when AI lowers the cost of production, taste stops being decorative and starts becoming economically decisive.

Imagine two people looking at the same opportunity.

The first person has formal training, a recognized role, and access to a large company. They use AI to move faster on tasks that were already

assigned to them. They summarize documents, draft emails, outline presentations, clean up code, and automate repetitive work. They become more efficient inside an existing system. That matters. It may even improve their career.

The second person may have less pedigree. They may not manage anyone. They may not even identify as technical. But they notice a sharp unmet need in a niche they know well. They use AI to test a concept, generate a rough interface, write copy, wire together a workflow, validate demand, collect feedback, and publish something useful before a committee would have finished discussing naming options. They create an asset. The asset reaches users. Users create data, proof, revenue, or audience. That changes the person's position in the world.

One person saved time.

The other person built leverage.

That distinction sits at the center of this book. The divide that matters most is increasingly not technical versus nontechnical. It is not coder versus non-coder. It is not even employee versus founder, at least not at first. The more important divide is between people who use AI as a convenience layer on top of their job and people who use AI as a force multiplier for judgment, initiative, and creation.

The second group is quietly pulling away.

They are building internal tools without waiting for roadmap approval. They are creating niche software products at night. They are packaging knowledge into products instead of leaving it trapped in meetings. They are turning loose insight into something that can be seen, tested, shared, bought, or hired against. They are accumulating proof. Proof compounds. Proof is what gives you options.

This matters because the internet increasingly rewards optionality over stability.

In the previous era, the safest strategy often looked like joining the right institution. Get the credential. Enter the firm. Learn the process. Move up

the ladder. Build a reputation inside systems that validated quality for everyone else. There was logic to this. Institutions held distribution, tools, training, and trust. They reduced uncertainty. If you wanted to make meaningful things, they were often the best available vehicle.

Today, institutions still provide all of that. But they no longer monopolize the path from competence to visible output. A person with clear judgment and AI fluency can now do work that used to require a small department. They can test markets that used to be too small to justify a team. They can create artifacts that signal capability more convincingly than a resume bullet ever could. They can build before they are given permission to build.

That changes the economics of ambition.

You can see this shift most clearly at the edges, where categories are still unstable and the rules are not settled. A marketer prototypes software. A designer launches a workflow tool. An analyst builds a research product. A founder with weak coding skills ships a usable app anyway. A customer support lead creates an internal automation stack that becomes a company asset. None of these people are pretending expertise they do not have. The best of them are doing something more practical. They are using AI to bridge the distance between what they can imagine and what they can make real.

This is where many people become uncomfortable. The old map offered a kind of moral clarity. There were builders and there were non-builders. There were technical people and business people. There were creators and managers. There were professionals and amateurs. AI blurs those lines, and blurred lines make status legible in new ways. Some people who looked indispensable turn out to have been expensive routing layers. Some people who looked peripheral turn out to have unusually strong product instinct. Some people who never learned the old tools can still direct the new ones effectively enough to matter.

This does not mean skill no longer matters. It means skill is being rearranged.

Plenty of work still requires deep technical depth, and some of it always will. Advanced systems, hard engineering, infrastructure, security, cutting-edge research, and many forms of operational excellence remain difficult for good reason. The point is not that AI erases expertise. The point is that expertise no longer has a monopoly on output. A wider set of people can now participate in creation, and when more people can create, the source of differentiation moves upstream. The scarce thing becomes not just execution, but judgment about what execution should aim at.

That is why so many AI-generated things feel empty. The problem is rarely that the model is incapable of producing words, images, code, or layouts. The problem is that generation is cheap and direction is not. Generic inputs produce generic outputs. Weak judgment scales mediocrity. If a person cannot tell the difference between a rough first pass and a product people will actually want, AI only helps them flood the zone faster.

But the opposite is also true. Strong judgment now travels farther than it used to.

A founder with a sharp sense of user pain can move from concept to interface before a larger competitor has finished staffing the project. A writer with clear narrative instinct can turn research into products, courses, tools, and communities instead of stopping at content. A domain expert who understands a messy workflow can use AI to wrap software around that insight and create value where none existed before. The person with taste is no longer standing at the edge of production asking someone else to make the thing. Increasingly, they can bring the thing into existence themselves.

This has consequences for careers, companies, and markets.

For careers, it means your most important asset may no longer be your role. It may be your ability to repeatedly convert insight into visible, compounding artifacts. A role can disappear in a reorg. A title can lose relevance. But if you know how to spot an opening, use AI to produce something useful, get it in front of real users, and iterate quickly, you are harder to trap in someone else's system. You have portable leverage.

For companies, it means talent evaluation gets stranger. The person who thrives in the next era may not always be the person with the smoothest corporate polish. It may be the one who ships weirdly effective tools before anyone asked, who sees demand signals early, who understands both customers and internet culture, who can direct models well, and who is impatient with unnecessary ceremony. That person can be messy. They can also be enormously valuable.

For markets, it means value creation becomes more granular. There are thousands of products, workflows, audiences, and micro-businesses that were not viable under the old cost structure. AI makes many of them viable. Not all of them become venture-scale outcomes. That is fine. The point is not that every person becomes a unicorn founder. The point is that more people can build meaningful assets, and asset creation changes bargaining power. It creates side income, distribution, reputation, deal flow, and escape velocity.

This is why the phrase vibe, used carelessly, causes confusion. To some people it signals unseriousness, a kind of reckless improvisation dressed up as genius. They picture sloppiness, hype, screenshots, and people congratulating themselves for making broken prototypes that collapse under pressure. There is some truth in the caricature because every new tool wave attracts performance. But the useful version of vibe is not chaos. It is disciplined instinct at the front end of creation.

It is the combination of product taste, timing sense, cultural fluency, directional confidence, and willingness to move before every variable is pinned down. It is knowing when a rough prototype is enough to learn something real. It is understanding what users forgive and what they do not. It is having a feel for what feels alive versus dead on arrival. It is also having the nerve to act on that feel, then tighten, refine, and operationalize after contact with reality.

In older organizations, this kind of instinct was often subordinated to process. Sometimes that was necessary. At scale, process protects quality. It prevents expensive mistakes. It coordinates teams that do not share context. But process can also become a tax on initiative. It can flatten original judgment into approved language, approved experiments, approved roadmaps, approved ambition. AI changes that equation because