



USING AI TO EMPOWER SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

A Conversation with Kasia Weina,
Founding Partner & Director at
Evergreen Labs

A 2025 CASE STUDY BY



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Evergreen Labs, headquartered in Singapore with country offices in Vietnam and the Philippines, is a creative business lab focused on social, circular economy venture building in Southeast Asia since 2016. Our purpose organization aims to solve pressing environmental and social challenges through innovative, circular social businesses in emerging Asia and beyond.

To date, we have built and currently operate four social enterprises and use our grassroots expertise to work with development organizations, private sector businesses, and governments on various projects across SEA. Our core expertise lies in solid waste management (primarily plastics), agriculture value chain, water, circular economy models (including reuse systems & closed-loop supply chains), upcycling technology, and responsible, inclusive supply chains.

Evergreen Labs pioneers accessible sustainability through decentralized innovation. We build affordable, ground-up solutions that bring the circular economy to those who need it most, transforming environmental challenges into opportunities for all.

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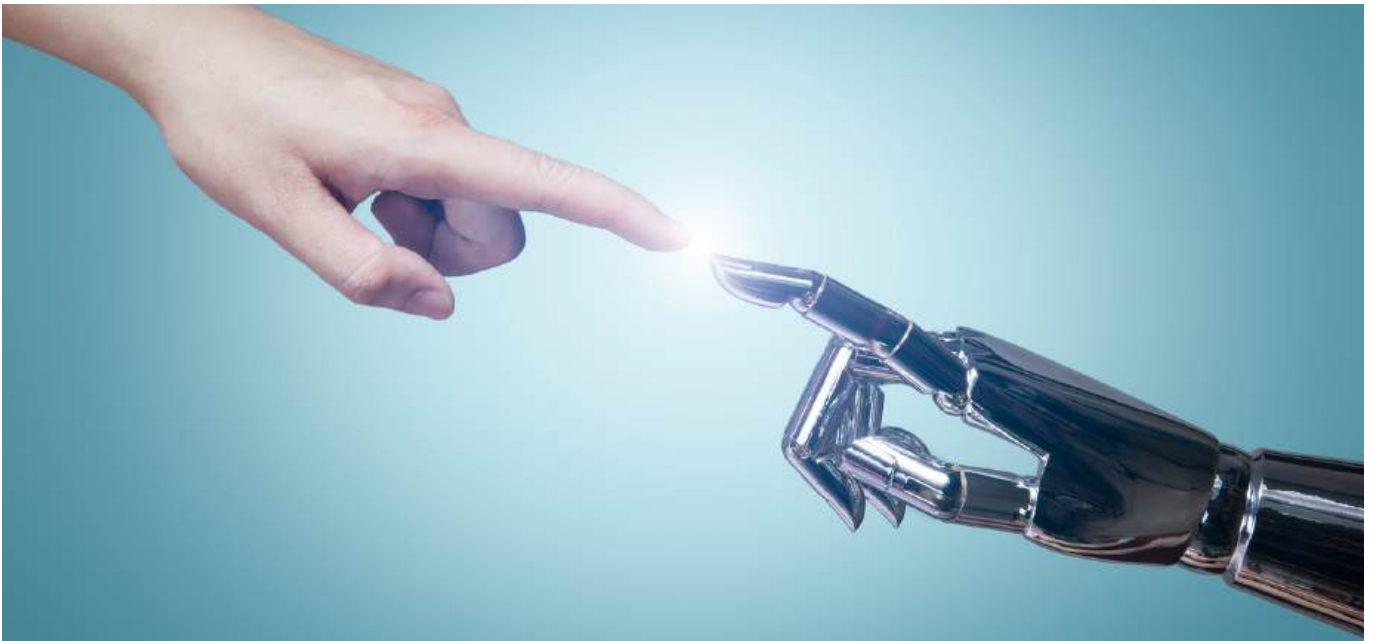


INTRODUCTION

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Social enterprises often operate with limited resources while trying to create meaningful impact in communities around the world. Unlike profit-focused corporations, these organisations navigate the delicate balance between financial sustainability and social mission, frequently facing operational constraints that limit their potential reach and effectiveness.

This case study examines how artificial intelligence (AI) tools can transform operations for social enterprises, allowing them to compete more effectively while staying true to their impact-driven missions. Through an in-depth interview with Kasia Weina, Founding Partner and Director at Evergreen Labs - an organisation developing sustainable impact ventures and solutions across Southeast Asia and beyond - we explore practical applications of AI that can address common challenges faced by social entrepreneurs.



THE RESOURCE CHALLENGE FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Social enterprises face unique operational constraints compared to traditional businesses. As Kasia explains, "There are significant resource constraints when you're building any business. But particularly for social impact or social enterprise because part of your mission is also to do good and not focus necessarily on generating profit... just by definition, the budgetary restrictions are very strong with social entrepreneurship."

These constraints manifest in several key ways:

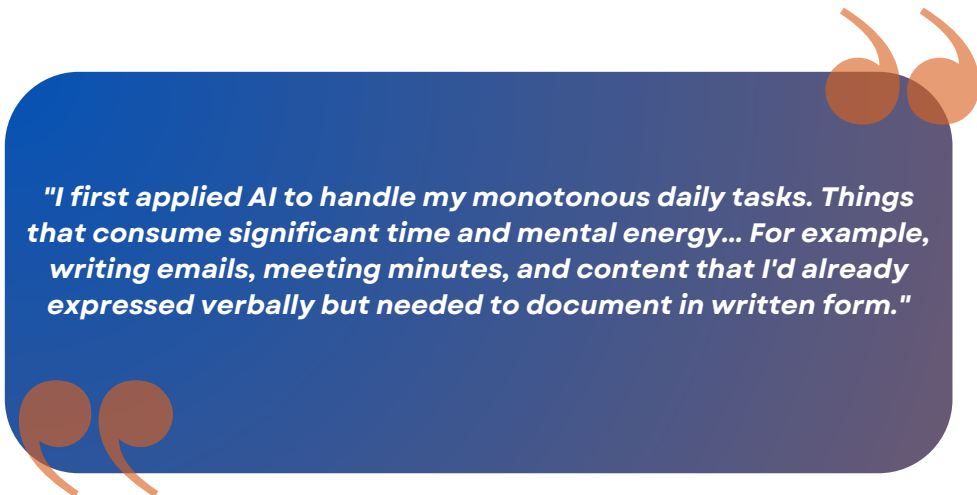
1. **Limited staffing capacity:** Social entrepreneurs often wear multiple hats and cannot afford specialised talent in areas like marketing, business development, or customer service.
2. **Mission-centric versus market-centric focus:** "Social entrepreneurs come first and foremost from the impact side... they're not thinking about their customers that much, or how to place their product in the market," notes Kasia, highlighting how this affects their competitive positioning.
3. **Difficulty attracting top-tier talent:** Competing with profit-driven companies for skilled professionals is challenging when working with limited budgets. As Jack observed, "If you want someone who's the very top level at marketing in a certain thing, the chances are that there's going to be some company that's focused only on profit that offers them a ton of money."
4. **Educational burden:** Unlike traditional businesses, social enterprises often need to educate customers about why their products might be more expensive or require different usage patterns, adding another layer of marketing complexity.

HOW AI IS CHANGING OPERATIONS AT EVERGREEN LABS

Kasia's journey with AI integration at Evergreen Labs provides practical insights into how social enterprises can leverage these tools. Rather than replacing human capabilities entirely, AI works as an "outsourced team member" that complements existing staff while addressing key operational pain points.

Initial Applications: Time-Saving and Brain Power Conservation

Kasia began by targeting repetitive tasks that consumed disproportionate time and mental energy:



"I first applied AI to handle my monotonous daily tasks. Things that consume significant time and mental energy... For example, writing emails, meeting minutes, and content that I'd already expressed verbally but needed to document in written form."

The transcription and formatting capabilities allowed her to avoid duplicating mental effort: "I had already used my brain to say it out loud, and then I'd have to repeat the process, think about it again, and remember what was said."

Other initial applications included:

- **Proposal writing:** Rather than hiring dedicated staff, AI helps generate grant applications and proposals based on organisational information.
- **Copywriting:** "It's really difficult for me to find a proper copywriter, especially in Vietnam. Looking abroad, also hard to manage remote staff."
- **Professional communications:** Ensuring consistent quality across teams in different countries.

Evolving into Strategic Applications

As Kasia's familiarity with AI tools grew, applications expanded from day-to-day tasks to strategic uses:

"Now I use AI for the daily tasks as standard. I also see its potential as a strategic partner where we can ask for business development guidance or help with market entry and expansion plans."

Examples of strategic applications include:

- **Market research:** "I asked it how relevant the Malaysian market would be for Evergreen Labs to enter in the future and open a new office... based on what it knows about regulations and new laws."
- **Customer segmentation:** Helping identify new markets or customer segments that might not be immediately obvious to the team.
- **Strategic decision-making:** Providing objective analysis for business development decisions.

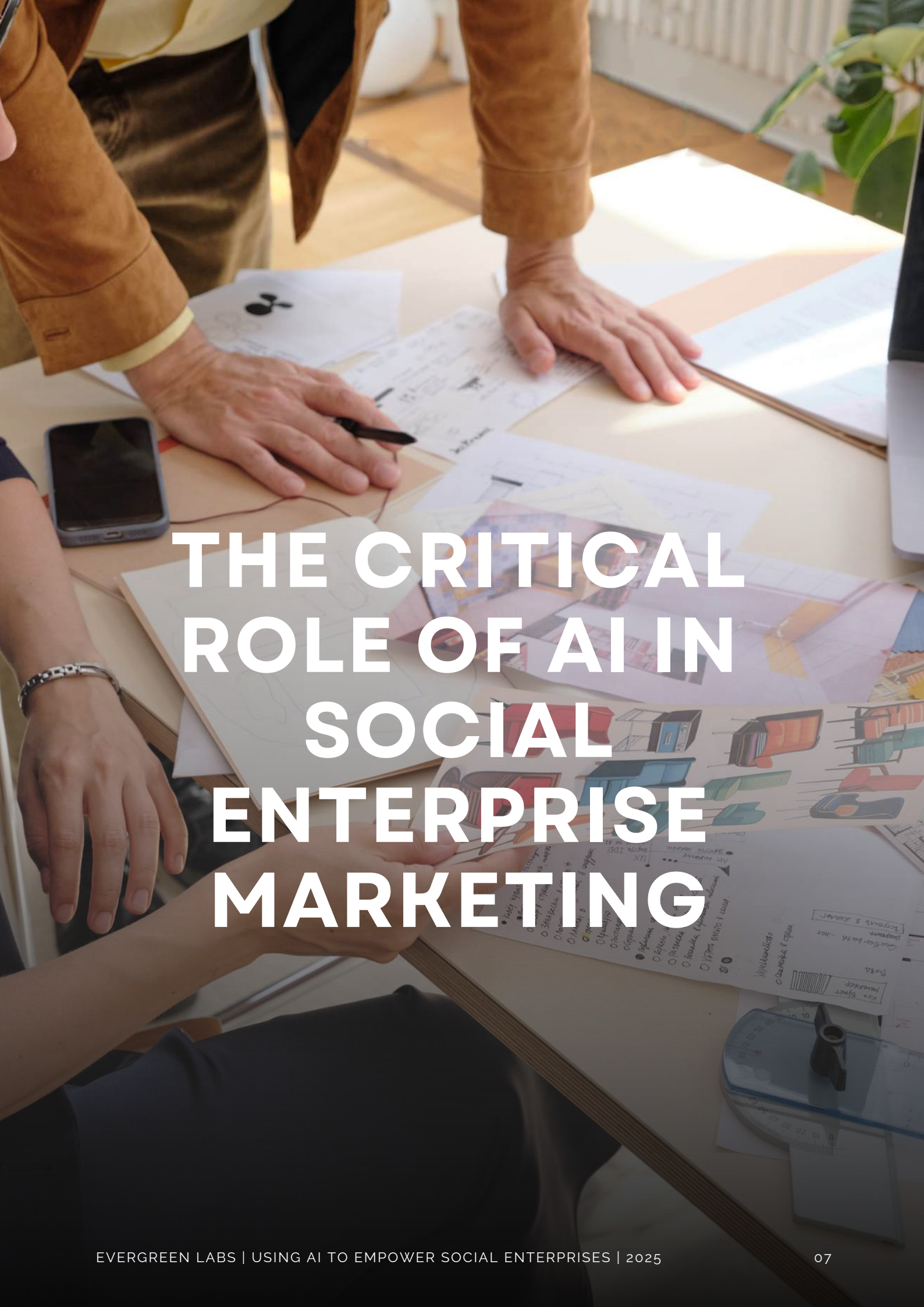
Organisational Impact and Change

The integration of AI has reshaped Evergreen Labs' operational structure:

Additional key points about AI applications at Evergreen Labs:

- **Team structure shifting:** "It changed the structure of my communications team. Instead of having multiple people, we now have one graphic designer for visuals who doesn't need to worry about copywriting."
- **Organisation-wide adoption:** The entire team now uses AI for professional communications, maintaining consistent standards across international operations.
- **Leadership focus:** Management can concentrate on "creative tasks, strategic work... dealing with complex issues" rather than administrative work.
- **Market research capabilities:** "I asked AI about the Malaysian market's potential for Evergreen Labs to enter and open a new office... based on regulations, laws, and circular economy opportunities."
- **Process automation:** Focus on automating processes requiring extensive training and documentation, which create vulnerabilities during staff transitions.
- **Professional communications:** Ensuring consistent quality across teams in different countries - "All staff now check their emails with AI for professionalism and tone."





THE CRITICAL ROLE OF AI IN SOCIAL ENTERPRISE MARKETING

For social enterprises, marketing presents unique challenges beyond those faced by traditional businesses. Unlike corporations that can compete primarily on price or convenience, social enterprises often need to:



As Kasia explains, "For Glassia Water, we focus heavily on customer awareness, education, and behavioural change. We need to re-educate people on how to reuse packaging because we've become so accustomed to just throwing it away after one-time use... we have no reuse culture anymore."

This educational burden creates additional marketing demands: "We have to change how our customers operate to use our products. Even though it's not technically our job to do that, for them to adopt the product, we've taken that responsibility on ourselves."

AI can help social enterprises handle this additional marketing work by:

- Generating educational content across multiple platforms
- Developing behavioural change strategies
- Creating consistent messaging that balances impact storytelling with market positioning
- Enabling smaller teams to maintain a larger content presence



ADDRESSING ADOPTION BARRIERS



Despite the potential benefits, social enterprises may hesitate to adopt AI tools. Kasia identified several common concerns:

The "Human Touch" Concern

Some social entrepreneurs worry that AI-generated content might lack authenticity or the human element central to their mission. Kasia challenges this perception:



"I think that's a common misconception about AI. It can be even more prevalent for impact organisations, because they might think authenticity is their unique selling point. But it's about knowing how to use AI properly, understanding how to prompt it and work with it."

The key insight is that AI requires proper guidance and iteration: "I never just copy-paste what AI generates. I work with it through several iterations before I get to a usable format. And even then I usually edit it."

Skill Development Requirements

Learning to use AI effectively requires an investment of time and energy that can initially seem daunting. As Kasia notes, many social entrepreneurs come from impact backgrounds rather than technology, potentially creating an adoption barrier.

However, she emphasises that starting small can overcome this challenge: "Find something that could be really straightforward, also like translation and stuff, all of that could be easily solved. And then I think the door starts to open wider."

Concerns About Job Displacement

While valid in some contexts, Kasia's experience suggests that AI often replaces functions rather than entire roles, particularly in resource-constrained social enterprises:

"In our organisation? Not really. One staff role was effectively replaced with AI - the copywriter. But I see that certain positions like executive assistants and copywriters will likely be the first to change as people become more adept with these tools."



The benefit for small organisations is reduced administrative burden: "I don't need to hire a person. I can work with AI and prompt it effectively. That saves money and a tremendous amount of time."

A small green plant with several leaves is growing out of a laptop keyboard. The background is blurred, showing the laptop screen and other parts of the desk.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Looking ahead, Kasia envisions expanding AI integration at Evergreen Labs to include:

- **Customer service automation:** "I'd like to implement more AI chatbots on our websites and social media to respond to inquiries. This is a repetitive task that requires significant team member training."
- **Process automation:** Focusing particularly on areas requiring extensive training and documentation, which create vulnerabilities during staff transitions.
- **Enhanced user experiences:** Improving customer interactions through more sophisticated AI tools.

The underlying philosophy is to minimise organisational vulnerabilities while maximising impact: "For a small organisation, the biggest challenge is when you have staff turnover or structural changes. You always face a transition and retraining process that can set you back months."

ADVICE FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

For social enterprises looking to begin their AI journey, Kasia recommends:

1. **Start small:** Begin with straightforward applications that deliver immediate value: "Find something simple like translation."
2. **Seek community:** "Look for a community of other social entrepreneurs, online courses to help you get familiar with AI and what it can do."
3. **Focus on specific needs:** Target your most pressing operational challenges first: "Understanding your specific needs and just trying to get started with that."
4. **Allow your perspective to evolve:** "First you need to understand what AI can do, and then your mind opens to what you could use it for."
5. **Iterative improvement:** "When I feel content is too generic or AI-like, I know my prompt needs work. It's never just copy-paste - it's a process."





CONCLUSION

For social enterprises balancing impact and sustainability, AI offers a real opportunity to improve operations without major cost increases. By working as an "outsourced team member," AI tools can help even the odds with larger, profit-focused competitors while these organisations keep their focus on creating positive social and environmental change.

Evergreen Labs' experience shows that even small investments in AI can create meaningful operational improvements, from better administrative functions to improved strategic decision-making. As these tools continue to develop, they give social entrepreneurs new ways to grow their impact while managing the unique challenges of purpose-driven organisations.

This case study was developed from a conversation between Jack Austin, AI Consultant at AI-Informer, and Kasia Weina, Founding Partner & Director at Evergreen Labs, March 2025.





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