

Help AI Understand Your Business Data

A practical guide to schemas, semantic layers, and making AI more reliable with your business information.

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Why this matters now

As AI models become more capable, we're hearing a different question from clients: How can AI work more effectively with the business data we already have? Teams may connect AI to reports, databases, or applications, only to find that it interprets familiar metrics differently from their people or returns inconsistent answers.

Access is only part of the equation. AI also needs to know how information is structured and which business rules to apply. Some companies are investing in data platforms like Snowflake to address this. Others can make meaningful progress with the tools and resources they already have. It's not an all-or-nothing decision.

What the terms actually mean

Data connection	How an AI tool gets approved access to information in a file, database, or business application.
Schema	The structure of data, including its tables, fields, data types, and relationships.
Semantic layer	The shared business meaning of data, including definitions, calculations, and relationships. A formal semantic layer encodes these rules so reporting tools and compatible AI systems can reuse them.

For example

Ask AI: "What was revenue last quarter?" The connection gives it access to sales data. The schema helps it locate orders, returns, and dates. The semantic layer establishes what counts as revenue and which dates define the quarter. Without those rules, an answer can look right and still be wrong.

Three ways to improve how AI uses your data

These are different levels of sophistication, not required steps. Choose based on the questions you're trying to answer and the tools you already have.

01 Lightweight: Give AI better context

Document key metrics, data sources, and calculations in a plain-language data dictionary. Provide those definitions with approved exports or existing AI connections, then compare answers against trusted reports.

Best for: A few focused use cases. Who can help: Business owner and AI-literate analyst. Investment: Low.

02 Moderate: Build on your existing tools

Create reusable data models, relationships, and calculations in tools you already use, such as Power BI or your analytics environment. Check that the AI tools you're using can actually apply those definitions rather than bypassing them.

Best for: Multiple recurring use cases. Who can help: BI specialist or analytics engineer working with business owners. Investment: Moderate, sometimes within existing licenses.

03 Advanced: Invest in a broader data foundation

Consider platforms such as Snowflake, Microsoft Fabric, or BigQuery when you need dependable pipelines, shared data models, stronger governance, and consistent access across many AI tools and teams. The platform provides infrastructure; your organization still needs to define the metrics and maintain the data.

Best for: Complex, cross-functional needs and AI at scale. Who can help: Data architect, data engineer, analytics engineer, and IT/security. Investment: Higher, including ongoing ownership.

Where to start

Start with one important business question AI isn't answering reliably. Then ask:

- Is the issue missing access, poor data quality, or unclear business definitions?
- Who owns the correct answer and can define how it should be calculated?
- What can we improve using the systems and expertise we already have?

Test against known correct answers before expanding access or automating decisions. A larger platform may make sense when the same data problems keep slowing down multiple teams, but it won't fix inconsistent definitions or bad source data on its own.

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We help companies work through these questions, from a first use case to a broader data platform.

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