



AI STRATEGY BRIEF

Northbrook & Co.

Where AI can help across your business

Prepared for: Northbrook & Co.

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1. Executive Summary

Northbrook & Co. is a 22-person independent home goods retailer based in Manchester, operating across three sales channels: a physical flagship shop in the Northern Quarter, an online store, and a small wholesale arm supplying independent boutiques across the North of England. The business is owner-managed by Sarah Eltham, who founded it in 2012 and has grown it through a combination of strong product curation, loyal repeat customers, and disciplined operational management.

Northbrook is at an early stage of AI adoption. Some team members have used ChatGPT informally for product description drafting and customer email responses. There is no structured AI strategy, no dedicated tooling, and no defined ownership for AI initiatives. The business has strong commercial fundamentals and a clean enough data layer to start moving quickly.

This brief identifies five priority opportunities where AI could meaningfully reduce time spent on operational work, improve marketing performance, and surface patterns in sales data that are currently invisible. Together they represent roughly 25 to 35 hours per week of recovered team time across the business and a meaningful uplift in marketing efficiency. None of the opportunities require significant infrastructure investment.

2. Business Context

Northbrook & Co. trades in mid-market home goods: ceramics, textiles, lighting, small furniture, and seasonal homeware. The product range is curated by Sarah and a small buying team, with a strong emphasis on independent makers and small-batch suppliers across the UK and Europe. Average order value online is approximately £85; in-store basket sizes are higher, averaging around £140.

Revenue is split roughly 50% retail (shop and online combined), 35% wholesale, and 15% events and pop-ups. Online has grown from approximately 18% of revenue in 2020 to its current share, driven by deliberate investment in photography, product content, and a small but effective social media presence. The wholesale arm has been deliberately kept manageable: Sarah does not want it to dominate the brand.

The team of 22 sits across shop floor (8), online and content (3), wholesale and accounts (4), buying (3), and operations and warehouse (4). Sarah herself remains close to buying, marketing direction, and senior wholesale relationships. There is no in-house developer or data analyst. The business works with a freelance web developer on a retainer for the Shopify storefront, and an external accountant who handles statutory work.

Strategic priorities for the next 12 months are: growing online revenue without losing the brand character that makes the shop work, improving margin on wholesale (currently the lowest-margin channel), and reducing the operational load on Sarah personally so she can focus on buying and brand direction.

What we heard

Sarah said it plainly on the call: "I'm not anti-AI, I just don't have time to figure out where to start, and I'm worried about it making the brand sound like everyone else's. I need someone to tell me which two or three things are worth doing first, not show me a list of fifty tools."

3. Current AI Maturity

Maturity level: Early Adopter, individually rather than organisationally.

Several team members use AI tools on an ad-hoc personal basis. The online content lead, Mira, uses ChatGPT for first-draft product descriptions and has experimented with Midjourney for mood-boarding new collections. The wholesale manager uses Claude for drafting follow-up emails to slow-paying accounts. None of this is coordinated, documented, or shared across the team.

There is no organisational AI tooling, no shared workspace for AI workflows, and no playbook that codifies which tools to use for which jobs. As a result, the gains from individual use are not compounding: each person figures it out alone, and the knowledge does not transfer when someone leaves.

Data foundations are reasonable. Shopify holds the bulk of sales and customer data with clean enough records to be useful. Wholesale orders are managed in a custom Airtable base built two years ago, which works well operationally but is not connected to the Shopify side. Email marketing runs on Klaviyo with a healthy list of around 28,000 subscribers. Social channels are managed manually with no scheduling tool.

The biggest data gap is around marketing attribution. Northbrook spends roughly £4,000 per month on Meta and Google ads but has only a partial picture of which campaigns drive revenue, particularly when customers see an ad online and then purchase in-store.

Honest assessment

Northbrook is in a strong position to move fast. The data is cleaner than most independent retailers we see, the team is open-minded about AI, and the brand has a defined enough voice that AI-assisted content can be guided well. The risk is not capability, it is focus. Trying to do all of these at once would dilute attention. Pick two or three and do them properly before moving on.

4. Opportunity Map

Five opportunities are described below, ordered by how we recommend approaching them. The first two are quick wins with low risk and clear immediate value. The next two are medium-term efforts with higher payoff. The fifth is exploratory but worth knowing about.

4.1 AI-assisted product content at scale

Opportunity	Use AI to draft product descriptions, ad copy, and email content with brand voice maintained through a structured prompt library
Complexity	Low
Business area	Online and content team
Potential impact	10-15 hours per week recovered for Mira's team. Faster time-to-market for new products. More consistent voice across channels
Approach	Document Northbrook's brand voice, tone, and product description structure in a shared prompt library used by the content team. Use Claude or ChatGPT with the prompt library to draft initial copy, with human review and polish. Apply to product pages, email campaigns, social captions, and Meta ad copy

4.2 Customer service triage and draft responses

Opportunity	Triage incoming customer service emails by intent (order query, returns, product question, wholesale enquiry) and draft suggested responses for the team to review and send
Complexity	Low to medium
Business area	Online, retail, and wholesale teams
Potential impact	8-10 hours per week recovered across the customer-facing team. Faster response times. More consistent answers
Approach	Connect the Gmail or shared inbox to a lightweight AI workflow (Zapier or n8n with Claude). Use a few examples of each enquiry type to teach the system how Northbrook responds. Drafts appear in the inbox or in a queue for human approval before sending

4.3 Wholesale customer prioritisation and outreach

Opportunity	Use the Airtable wholesale data to identify which accounts are at risk of churning, which have growth potential, and which should be deprioritised. Generate tailored outreach for each segment
Complexity	Medium
Business area	Wholesale team

Potential impact	Expected 8-12% uplift in wholesale revenue in the first 12 months from focused account management. Reduced time spent on accounts with limited potential
Approach	Build a simple scoring model on the existing Airtable data: order frequency, recency, total revenue, payment behaviour, and category mix. Use Claude to draft tailored outreach for each segment based on the score and account history. Wholesale team approves and sends

4.4 Marketing attribution and spend reallocation

Opportunity	Combine online sales data, in-store sales, and ad spend data into a single view that shows which marketing activity actually drives revenue across channels
Complexity	Medium to high
Business area	Marketing, online, and retail
Potential impact	Better-targeted spending of the £4,000 per month ad budget. Realistic expected improvement: 15-20% more revenue from the same spend, or the same revenue from 15-20% less spend
Approach	Set up a simple data layer combining Shopify, in-store POS, and Klaviyo data, with ad data from Meta and Google overlaid. Use a tool such as Triple Whale or a custom dashboard to make attribution visible. Initial setup is the main investment; ongoing maintenance is light

4.5 Buying intelligence and trend signals

Opportunity	Use AI to analyse historical sales patterns, returns data, and external trend signals (Pinterest, Instagram, supplier catalogues) to inform seasonal buying decisions
Complexity	High and exploratory
Business area	Buying team
Potential impact	Difficult to quantify upfront. Most useful as decision support alongside Sarah's existing buying instincts rather than a replacement for them
Approach	Start with a focused pilot on one product category (e.g. ceramics or lighting) before any wider rollout. Combine internal sell-through data with external trend analysis. Sarah remains the decision maker; the AI provides a structured second opinion

5. Prioritisation

Our recommendation, given Northbrook's current state and the constraint of Sarah's time:

- 1. Start with content at scale (4.1).** Lowest risk, highest immediate time recovery, and the team is already using these tools informally. Building a proper prompt library and workflow within four to six weeks would compound the gains the team is already making individually
- 2. Add customer service triage (4.2).** Pair this with 4.1 so the team that benefits from content gains also gets help with their inbox. Expect three to four weeks of build time and a similar timeline to refine the responses to a level you would send unedited
- 3. Then wholesale prioritisation (4.3).** Higher revenue impact but takes longer to set up and requires Sarah's input on segmentation logic. Begin once 4.1 and 4.2 are running smoothly, roughly two to three months in
- 4. Marketing attribution (4.4).** Begin scoping in parallel with 4.3. Implementation is the longest of the five but the strategic value is high. Target initial dashboard live within four months
- 5. Hold buying intelligence (4.5).** Worth knowing about but do not start until the others are bedded in. The upside is uncertain and the team's time is better spent on the first four

Reality check

The realistic envelope for Northbrook in the next 12 months is items 1 through 4, in sequence, with reasonable spacing between them. Trying to do all five at once would create more disruption than value. A senior team member, probably Mira or the operations lead, needs to be given clear ownership of AI as part of their remit. Without that, this remains a list of good intentions

6. Recommended Next Steps

Do now (next 2 weeks)

Assign clear ownership of AI within the team. Mira is the natural candidate given existing usage and team position. Document the brand voice and product description structure into a working prompt library. Pick three to five recent product descriptions that exemplify Northbrook's voice and use them as anchor examples.

Do soon (next 1-3 months)

Roll out the content prompt library across the content team. Build the customer service triage workflow with a small pilot on one inbox before extending. Begin scoping the wholesale scoring

model in collaboration with the wholesale manager. Set a monthly review with Sarah to track impact and decide whether to accelerate, hold, or stop each initiative.

If you want to go further

Begin the marketing attribution project once the first two are bedded in. This is the largest payoff of the five opportunities and the most defensible against bigger competitors. Consider whether a fractional head of digital or a dedicated part-time analyst would help: at Northbrook's scale, two or three days a month of focused analytical capacity goes a long way.

About AgentAya

AgentAya helps small and mid-sized businesses navigate AI with clarity and honesty. We publish independent reviews of AI tools, run a free academy for business owners getting started with AI, and are developing an advisory practice focused on practical, hands-on AI implementation for companies that do not have dedicated AI teams.

You can find us at agentaya.com.