

# So, you want to be a solopreneur. AI helps but here's what you need to know

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## So, you want to be a solopreneur. AI helps but here's what you need to know

Agentic AI can make it easier to start a business and offers a new career pathway.



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It seems almost too good to be true: entire companies with healthy revenue streams and all of one headcount who is the CEO, finance, marketing and procurement departments combined, plus the intern thrown in too. Such one-person companies, also known as solopreneurs, seem to have emerged with a ferocity in the age of agentic AI.

This trend is rising in China, which saw the "raising a lobster" craze early in 2026 when people rushed to install the open-source agentic AI platform OpenClaw for automating tasks such as drafting reports, organising e-mails and booking flights. Leveraging such artificial intelligence tools, young people in China are increasingly launching AI-powered "one-person companies" (OPCs) as the technology can now handle many business functions, making it far easier for individuals to operate alone.

Besides ease of operations, these solopreneurs' motivations for founding these companies are fuelled, if not accelerated, by growing concerns over age discrimination and limited job prospects.

Local governments are far from oblivious to this trend and, in fact, actively support it. Suzhou plans to develop over 10,000 OPC entrepreneurs by 2028 with major investment support, while Chengdu is offering subsidies for graduates to start AI-driven solo businesses.

Municipal governments across China are introducing such policies, even adopting the English acronym "OPC" in official policy language, an uncommon practice in Chinese government communications. Analysts see these moves as a low-cost strategy to address high youth unemployment in the country, particularly among young adults.

In India, where youth unemployment is also a pressing concern, AI can be both a serious threat and potential relief. AI certainly poses a challenge to India's US\$300 billion (S\$387 billion) outsourcing industry, which employs millions of people. Shares in Indian IT firms plunged when Anthropic launched its new suite of professional AI tools in February.

With the traditional backroom process outsourcing model under

threat, OPCs have been identified by business analysts as a critical growth sector where freelancers, content creators and consultants have progressively transitioned from performing part-time gig work to becoming full-time business owners.

Seen as nimble micro-enterprises that create self-employment while addressing niche markets, India's solopreneurs are remaking themselves into "agentic founders" by exploiting autonomous AI agents for marketing, operations and coding needs. By taking advantage of these AI tools, solopreneurs can run their business through creating a "Digital Twin" of a traditional team.

In Singapore, sole proprietorships and partnerships are the primary legal vehicle for solopreneurs, freelancers, independent consultants and micro-entrepreneurs operating in the formal economy.

Data from ACRA indicates that 2025 saw 18,199 new sole proprietorship registrations, a new annual high since 2021 and a 2.6 per cent increase from 2024, suggesting that there is renewed momentum in the solopreneur segment after post-pandemic normalisation. However, it is unclear at this stage if this rise can be attributed to rising AI adoption.

### GOING SOLO IS GREAT, BUT CAN IT SCALE?

The virtues of solopreneurship

are striking. One-person businesses offer several advantages, including full autonomy over decisions and profits, allowing founders to move quickly and adapt easily. They also operate with much lower costs, since there is little need for large offices, staff or heavy overheads. Such ventures also provide greater flexibility in terms of work location and schedule, making them attractive for those seeking superior work-life balance.

Administrative tasks such as tax filing are often simpler as well, particularly in places like Singapore where solo business income can be filed through personal tax systems. Finally, solopreneurs are often able to deliver more personalised and authentic customer service due to their direct engagement with clients, helping build stronger trust and loyalty.

Primarily, solopreneurship is suited to knowledge work such as market research, content creation and even sales and distribution.

In early April, The New York Times reported that one Matthew Gallagher had built his company Medvi, a telehealth provider of GLP-1 weight-loss drugs, in just two months. Spending only US\$20,000 and with the help of a range of AI tools, he single-handedly took care of coding, marketing, customer service and business analytics.

His start-up grew quickly, reaching 1,300 customers within two months and generating US\$401 million in sales in 2025. It

was only after his first year of operation as an OPC that he hired his brother Elliot as his sole employee. Medvi is now projected to hit US\$1.8 billion in sales this year.

Medvi's resounding success is an extreme example of survivorship bias. Gallagher may have triumphed as a solopreneur, and gloriously at that, but we cannot discount the possibility that many others attempted what he did but either failed or could not manage more than modest takings.

Indeed, experienced founders agree that you can eke out a living on your own steam, but if you want to scale your business, staying as a solo operation is simply untenable. The stress of managing all aspects of the business, even with the aid of automation, can overwhelm and lead to burnout.

As Pranav Krishnan, founder of environmental media platform EcoCupid notes: "When you (as the founder) become the business, the boundary between work and personal life erodes quickly, making burnout a persistent and underestimated risk."

Solopreneurs will also face the hard realities of commercialisation bottlenecks from trying to scale or distribute alone. Indeed, investor hesitation persists where venture capitalists view solo-founder teams as risky investments.

Above all is the feeling of isolation. Even as the joys of solitude and liberty from

managing divergent views of co-founders can be blissful, the strain of having no one to share your burdens with can compound over time. There is a fabled 4am friend that start-up founders recommend cultivating – these are the trusted confidants whom you can reliably turn to for support, advice or just a listening ear when all feels hopeless and bleak. This phenomenon speaks to the very real challenges of founding and running your own business that are not for the faint-hearted.

ChaseFlow, helmed by solopreneur Arnaud Rubeck, is an AI-native fintech start-up from the Singapore Management University Institute of Innovation & Entrepreneurship's Business Innovations Generator (BIG) incubation programme. Reflecting on the realities of building an AI-enabled company on his own steam, Rubeck observes that AI does not eliminate the difficulty of entrepreneurship so much as "remove the excuses".

He notes that while a single founder can now execute work that once required an entire team, the bottleneck has shifted from execution to prioritisation and decision-making. Emotional resilience and the discipline to remain focused amid an abundance of possibilities are his main challenges. "AI increases speed, but it also increases the surface area of distraction," he muses. Rubeck says he mitigates such trials by being extremely outcome-oriented.

### BOOSTING SOLOPRENEURS

Returning to the example of Medvi, a deeper look at its growth journey will illuminate another significant limitation of solopreneurship – expertise gaps.

The company has faced legal and regulatory scrutiny over its marketing practices. In February, the US Food and Drug Administration issued a warning over allegedly misleading claims on a Medvi-affiliated website that implied its drugs were FDA-approved when they were not.

The company said the content was removed after the warning. It had also marketed its products using AI-generated before-and-after photos of

consumers which were tantamount to false claims. More recently, Medvi was hit with a proposed class-action lawsuit in California accusing it of violating anti-spam laws by using deceptive e-mail practices to bypass spam filters.

The Medvi lesson draws in stark relief how one-person businesses are ultimately constrained by the knowledge and competencies of the solopreneur.

While Gallagher might have had prior expertise in programming and marketing, he likely lacked the requisite background in governance, especially compliance requirements for medical products and services, a highly specialised and tightly regulated market. Indeed, he revealed to The New York Times that he designed Medvi as a "marketing layer" while outsourcing regulated infrastructure – such as medical professionals, prescriptions, pharmacies and medical licensing – to third-party telehealth compliance platforms like CareValidate and OpenLoop Health.

The lack of a 360-degree view is, in fact, where start-up incubation programmes can play a critical supporting role. At SMU's BIG incubator, for example, founders are connected to an extensive network of mentors (typically former founders or C-suite leaders), enterprise partners and investor connections.

Regular topical clinics give founders access to practitioners who have navigated the same terrain and faced similar struggles. Curated introductions to potential customers and investors are also facilitated.

Other structured programme touchpoints, from pitching sessions to go-to-market workshops, help founders stress-test their assumptions and sharpen their approach before going to market. The goal is not just to surface these needs, but to close the gap between where founders are and where they need to be.

When all is said and done, therefore, solopreneurship in the current era of agentic AI – where one can rapidly take brainwaves through ideation, prototyping, marketing and lead generation, through to execution and fulfilment – does provide an excellent taster for running a business.

With the prospects of entry-level jobs diminishing and graduates seeking alternative employment, solopreneurship may well offer a novel career development pathway.

Some speculate it could even become the future of work, where individuals leverage AI tools to ease into entrepreneurship when starting a business had previously seemed too daunting. With traditional career pathways much less certain than before, AI-powered solopreneurship could perhaps be that gentle on-ramp overcoming the purported Singaporean aversion to the entrepreneurial journey.

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A claw machine filled with lobster plush toys during a set-up session for open-source agentic AI platform OpenClaw outside Baidu's offices in Beijing in March, when the "raising a lobster" craze saw people rushing to install the platform for automating tasks. Leveraging such tools to handle business functions, young people in China are increasingly launching AI-powered "one-person companies". PHOTO: REUTERS