

Hiring an office admin vs buying AI tools

The year-one math for a small service business, and the work that stays human either way

Hire an office admin

One person, 40 hours a week, anything you train them on

Salary (typical market)	\$38,000–\$48,000
Payroll taxes, workers' comp, software seats	+20–30%
Training ramp before they carry the load	2–3 months
Typical tenure before you rehire and retrain	~2 years

Loaded year-one cost ~\$50,000

STRONGEST AT

- Live phone conversations and upset customers
- Judgment calls, exceptions, weird problems
- Walk-ins, paperwork with a story behind it
- Noticing things no system tracks

Costs the same again next year. Takes PTO, gets sick, eventually leaves with the training you paid for.

Buy AI tools + automations

Runs 24/7, never triages, only handles the repeatable work

Focused automation build (one-time)	low thousands
Full stack of automations	well under 1 year of salary
Time to ship	weeks, not months
Ongoing cost after year one	small monthly

Year-one cost **A fraction of a hire**

STRONGEST AT

- Appointment reminders and confirmations
- Quote follow-up on day 3, 5, and 7, every time
- Invoice nudges and review requests
- Missed-call text back and data entry between systems

Sends the day-five follow-up even during your worst week. Can't calm anyone down or make a judgment call.

The work that stays human either way

- The customer angry about a change order
- Insurance adjusters and complex billing
- Rescheduling around two sick crews
- Deciding when to bend your own policy
- Greeting whoever walks through the door
- Hearing that a longtime client sounded off

If the job is mostly the left column, hire. Mostly the right column, automate. A mix: automate first, then hire for what's left.

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