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Hannover Messe 2026

Five Signals Canadian Industrials Should Not Ignore

Special Briefing Note for Mid-Market Industrial Leaders

By Healy Consulting & Advisory

Executive Summary

A visit to Hannover Messe remains one of the clearest windows into where global industry is heading before trends fully land in Canada.

This year's message was unmistakable: industrial AI is moving from experimentation to execution. But the bigger story is broader than AI alone. Leading firms are combining intelligence, robotics, simulation, software, and energy systems into practical productivity gains.

For Canadian mid-market industrials, this creates both opportunity and urgency.

Recent Canadian data shows AI adoption is rising fast, but still early. Only 12.2% of Canadian businesses report using AI in operations, so nearly nine in ten still do not. Adoption remains concentrated in office-based sectors rather than physical industry. We are behind, there is no doubt.

The world is not waiting.

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Signal 1: AI Is Moving from Analyze → Assist → Act

The first era of AI focused on analyzing data:

- Dashboards
- Forecasting
- Predictive maintenance
- Anomaly detection

The second era focused on assisting people:

- Engineers
- Schedulers
- Procurement teams
- Operators
- Customer service teams

The emerging third era is acting:

- Robots adapting in real time
- Systems re-routing production dynamically
- Material flow optimizing itself
- Packaging lines adjusting to mix changes
- Machines making bounded decisions autonomously

This is AI moving from the screen to the shop floor. Canadian Reality Check: Most Canadian firms are still early in Phases 1 and 2, and 2 is generous. Statistics Canada reports only 12.2% of businesses currently use AI operationally. I see a lot of Copilot optimizing emails, and that's about it.

Signal 2: Canada's AI Adoption Is Still Concentrated in Knowledge Sectors

Canada is not absent from AI, but adoption is uneven.

Highest adoption sectors include:

- Information & Culture: 35.6%
- Professional / Scientific / Technical: 31.7%
- Finance & Insurance: 30.6%

This suggests Canada's AI gains have so far skewed toward digital and white-collar work. Meanwhile, the next economic upside may come from manufacturing, logistics, warehousing, and industrial operations. That is the opportunity gap.

Signal 3: Manufacturing Likely Near Its First Physical AI Wave

Statistics Canada reports 11.3% of manufacturing firms plan to adopt AI hardware in the next 12 months. That matters. This suggests Canadian manufacturers may be approaching the first meaningful wave of:

- AI-enabled robotics
- Vision systems
- Smart material handling
- Autonomous inspection
- Adaptive packaging
- Intelligent production cells

The next productivity S-curve is likely to be physical, not digital.

Signal 4: Digital Twins + AI + Automation Is the New Stack

Many global leaders showcased digital twins – virtual models of plants, lines, warehouses, and processes.

These allow firms to:

- Simulate capex before spending
- Stress-test scenarios
- Train AI safely before deployment
- Optimize throughput continuously

Think of the emerging industrial stack as: Digital Twin → AI Brain → Physical Execution. For many firms, the first AI investment may not be a robot. It may be a better model of the operation.

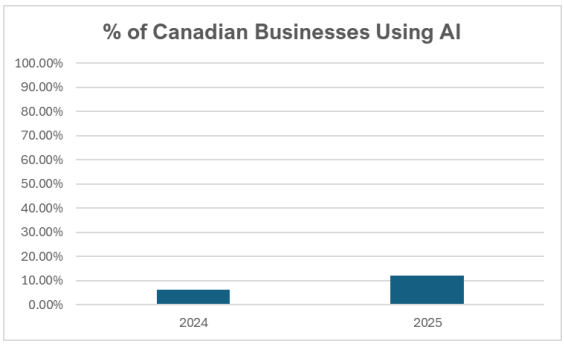
Signal 5: The Conversation Has Moved from Hype to ROI

The tone at Hannover Messe was pragmatic. Less: “What is AI?” More: ““Where does it pay first?” Winning use cases focused on:

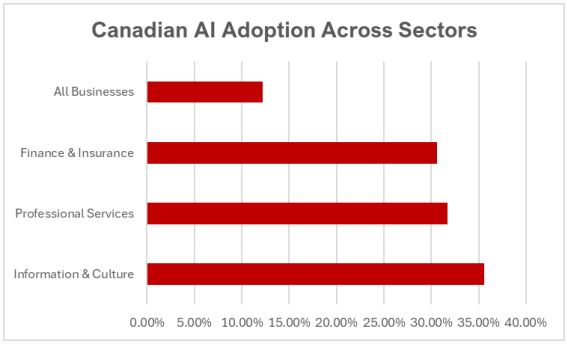
- Reduced downtime
- Faster changeovers
- Better planning
- Lower scrap
- Faster quoting
- Improved quality yield
- Labour productivity
- Lower energy intensity

Canadian firms should note: the market globally has matured.

Adoption doubled from ‘24 to ‘25, but remains early.



Canada’s AI story is still largely office-based.



Three Questions for Leadership Teams

1. Where does operational variability create hidden cost today?
2. Which decisions still rely on tribal knowledge rather than systems?
3. What capability must we build in the next 24 months to remain cost-competitive?

Bottom Line

The key lesson from Hannover Messe was not that AI is coming. It is that leading industrial firms are already operationalizing it, through robotics, digital twins, smarter planning, and energy systems.

Canada does not need to invent this wave.
But it does need to catch it.