

FREE GUIDE

Where to Start

A practical guide to finding your way through data, databases, and AI

Why this guide exists

I'm not a technology salesman. I'm a researcher — PhD, 40+ publications, fifteen years in the field — and for just as long I've taught database design at Politecnico di Torino. This guide comes from the same question I've been asked, in different forms, for years:

"Where do I even start putting my data in order?"

You won't find a list of tools to buy here. You'll find a way to understand where you actually stand, what's genuinely worth solving first, and how to tell whether a proposal — mine or anyone else's — actually fits your specific situation.

The problem isn't your data. It's how it's organized.

Almost every company I've worked with thought they had "a data problem." Almost never was that actually true. The problem, almost always, was that the data already existed — scattered, duplicated, never properly connected — and no one had ever built a system able to make it talk to itself reliably.

Before looking for a solution, it's worth recognizing the symptoms. Do you see yourself in at least one of these?

- **Your data lives in different spreadsheets** that no one can cross-reference anymore — one file for customers, one for orders, one for inventory, updated by hand by different people at different times.
- **You've heard about artificial intelligence** but don't know who to trust, or whether your company actually has the data needed to use it sensibly.
- **Every database change is an adventure** — a small tweak requires pulling in three people, risks breaking something else, and no one is quite sure how the original schema was built anymore.
- **You need to prove the use of digital technologies** for a grant, a tender, or funding, but what you've put together so far doesn't add up to a coherent story.

If you recognize yourself in two or more of these, the problem isn't "having more data" or "having the right AI" — it's **the underlying architecture**. And that has to be fixed before anything else.

Where you start matters more than where you want to end up

Before choosing a solution, try answering these four questions honestly. You don't need perfect answers — just honest ones.

1. How many different systems hold data that's "critical" to your business? If the answer is more than two or three, and none of these systems talk to each other, you've already identified the first problem to tackle: fragmentation.

2. Who in your company could answer a simple question about your data in under a minute? A question like "how many active customers did we have last quarter" should have an immediate answer. If it takes emailing three people and waiting a day, the problem isn't the question — it's the system that should be answering it.

3. The last time you changed something in your database, how long did it take and how many people were involved? A change that should take an hour but takes a week is the clearest symptom of a schema that was never designed to evolve.

4. Have you already tried an AI tool and stopped because you didn't trust the result? Almost always the problem isn't the AI model — it's the data you fed it: incomplete, inconsistent, or simply not organized to be queried in the first place.

Your answers to these four questions are worth more than any product demo: they tell you exactly where to start.

The method, in three steps

Once the starting point is clear, the path I follow with my clients is always the same, in three distinct phases.

1. Audit. An in-depth, paid analysis (not free — and there's a specific reason for that, explained below) of your current situation: how your data is structured, where the bottlenecks are, what's genuinely needed and what's superfluous. The audit ends with a written document, not a chat.

2. Plan. A document with priorities, timelines, and concrete estimates, included in the audit itself. Not a generic list of "best practices," but a plan tailored to your specific situation, with steps ordered by impact and urgency.

3. Delivery. A turnkey project, ongoing support, or a transfer of skills to your in-house team — whichever makes sense for you. Not every company needs (or wants) me to build everything: sometimes the real value is teaching your team to do it themselves.

Why the audit is paid, not free

This is a question I get asked often, and the answer is simple: a free audit, in most cases, is a superficial one — designed to lead you toward a sale, not to tell you the truth. A paid audit is serious work, carried out with the same rigor I'd bring to a scientific publication: if a solution won't hold up, I'll tell you before I sell it to you, not after.

Which depth level to choose

The audit comes in three depth tiers, designed for different situations:

- **Starter** — ideal for small businesses that need clear initial direction: a guided questionnaire, a customized report, and a final call to make sure everything is understood.
- **Standard** — built for SMEs with 5-30 employees that already have a data infrastructure worth evaluating in depth: an in-depth initial call, a comprehensive report, and a roadmap with measurable milestones and KPIs.
- **Premium** — for companies with 20-50 employees that, beyond the full audit, need a concrete transfer of skills: a workshop with the in-house team and a dedicated period of email support.

If you're not sure which tier fits you, that's normal — it's exactly the kind of question the first, no-obligation conversation is meant to answer.

Common mistakes to avoid

Over time, I've seen the same mistakes repeat themselves. They're worth naming explicitly.

Buying an AI tool before fixing the data. No tool, however sophisticated, can compensate for fragmented or inconsistent data. It's like bolting a race engine onto a rusted-out chassis.

Hiring a generalist agency for a data architecture problem. Building a website and designing a database are distinct skill sets. An agency that's good at building sites isn't automatically good at structuring the data that site will need to manage.

Putting it off because “it's fine for now.” The cost of disorganized data doesn't show up on an invoice — it shows up in the hours lost every week manually cross-referencing spreadsheets, in decisions made on the wrong numbers, in opportunities missed because no one had the data ready at the right moment.

Thinking the answer is “more data” instead of “more organized data.” Collecting even more information without first fixing what you already have only makes the problem worse.

The next step

If you recognize yourself in what you've just read, the simplest next step is a no-obligation conversation: tell me about your situation, and let's figure out together whether — and how — I can help.

flowygo.com/en/request-your-analysis

Alessandro Fiori — PhD in Computer Engineering, lecturer at Politecnico di Torino, 40+ scientific publications, 15+ years of experience across research and real-world projects.