

Forward Deployed Engineers turn AI pilots into working products

SlideCraft example

AI companies hire FDEs because most AI pilots stall before production

800%+

Growth in FDE job postings

A. Jan-Sep 2025

Prosource: Three data reported by FDE Company

~95%

Generative AI pilots with no measurable P&L impact

— 2025 study

MIT Research, The Search Group

2010s

Decade the role was created at Pinterest

Engineers placed with governments and enterprise customers

02 AI companies hire FDEs because most AI pilots stall before production

An FDE ships production software inside the customer's workflow

Role	Works	Delivers	Outaged by
Forward Deployed Engineer	Works the customer's team	Working software in production	Adapters and business value
Software engineer	In the product team	Features for many customers	Reviews and quality
Solutions engineer	In the sales cycle	Demos and proofs of concept	Details closed
Consultant	Hand to the client	Analysis and recommendations	Decisions taken

The FDE owns the outcome, not the demo

- Writes production code, not slides
- Designs and the workflow runs without them
- Brings repeated needs back to the product

03 An FDE ships production software inside the customer's workflow

The FDE cycle runs from the user's desk to the core product

Embed

Pick the job

Build

Ship and measure

Feed the product

Set with the people who do the work and map the workflow and its data

Choose the step where AI changes code, time or quality the most

Connect data, prompts, evaluations and guardrails on the platform

Run it in production and track adoption and the business metric

Turn custom work that repeats into product features

04 The FDE cycle runs from the user's desk to the core product

The profile combines production engineering, applied AI and customer judgement

Production engineering

Full-stack and data skills; integrates with legacy systems and owns reliability after go-live

Applied AI

Works with model APIs, retrieval, evaluations and guardrails — and knows when not to use a model

Customer judgement

Scopes problems with domain experts, explains trade-offs and says no to low-value requests

05 The profile combines production engineering, applied AI and customer judgement

Start with one FDE on your highest-value AI use case

Production engineering

Pilot one Forward Deployed Engineer for one quarter on a single production workflow

- Pick one workflow with a measurable business metric
Forecast 2025
- Assign or hire one engineer with production and AI experience
CTO: 2024
- Embed the engineer with the team that owns the workflow
Business owner: 2024
- Ship to production and review the metric every week
CEO: 2024
- Decide: scale, turn into product, or stop
Executive team: 2024

06 Start with one FDE on your highest-value AI use case