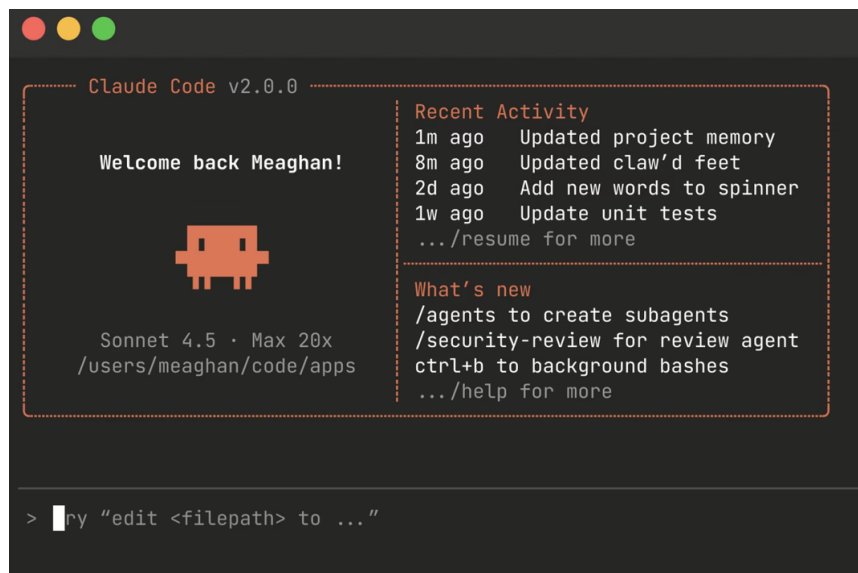**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**

Claude Is Taking the AI World by Storm, and Even Non-Nerds Are Blown Away

Developers and hobbyists are comparing the viral moment for Anthropic's Claude Code to the launch of generative AI

By *Bradley Olson* [Follow]

Jan. 17, 2026 at 12:00 pm ET

Despite its DOS-like interface, Claude Code is appealing even to non-engineers. ANTHROPIC

They call it getting "Claude-pilled."

It's the moment software engineers, executives and investors turn their work over to Anthropic's Claude AI—and then witness a thinking machine of shocking capability, even in an age awash in powerful artificial-intelligence tools.

Many coders spent their holiday breaks on a "Claude bender," testing out the capabilities of the latest Anthropic model, Claude Opus 4.5, which they used within a desktop coding tool called Claude Code. Tech companies have been incorporating code-writing AI into their workflows for years, and prior models were often compared with a junior software developer. The buzz around Claude's latest incarnation is something different.
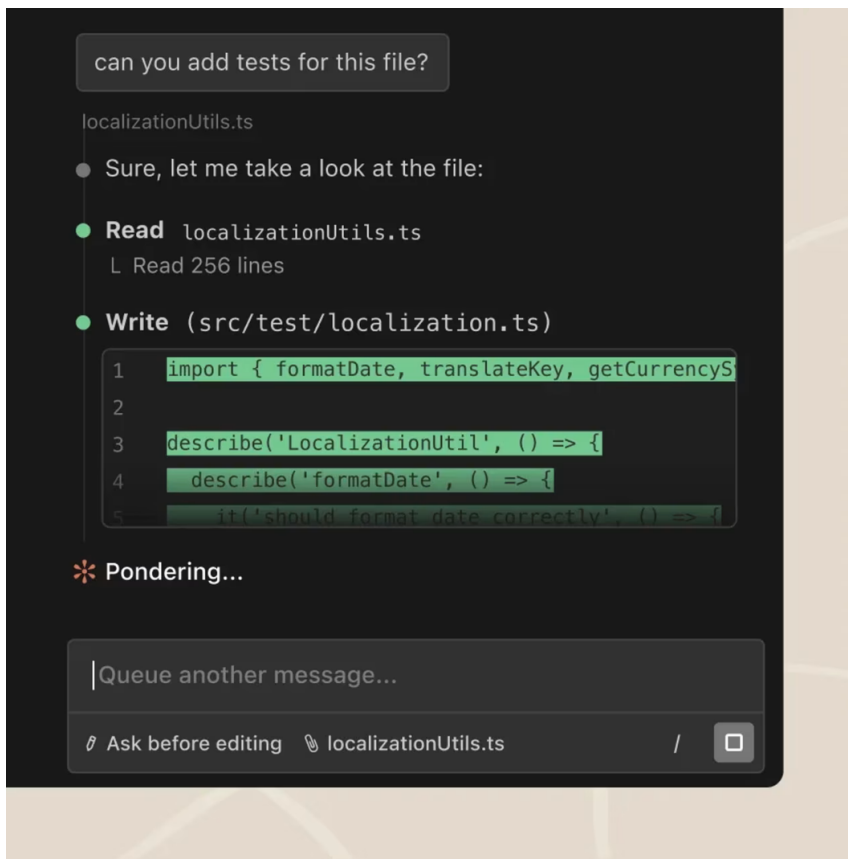
Malte Ubl is chief technology officer at Vercel, which helps develop and host websites and apps for users of Claude Code and other such tools. He said he used the tool to finish a complex project in a week that would've taken him about a year without AI. Ubl spent 10 hours a day on his vacation building new software and said each run gave him an endorphin rush akin to playing a Vegas slot machine.

The Claude zeal has spread widely this month, even to non-engineers. Many took to social media to describe the process of building their first software program without ever having learned to code. And despite the "code" in the name, people are using Claude Code for everything from health-data analysis to expense-report compiling as well.

Some described a feeling of awe followed by sadness at the realization that the program could easily replicate expertise they had built up over an entire career.

"It's amazing, and it's also scary," said Andrew Duca, chief executive of Awaken Tax, a cryptocurrency tax platform. Duca has been coding since he was in middle school. "I spent my whole life developing this skill, and it's literally one-shotted by Claude Code."

Anthropic often shares the spotlight with OpenAI. The two leading AI-model startups, which both lose billions of dollars, are [focused on different markets](#). OpenAI has a broad, global user base of consumers and has a far higher number of total users, while Anthropic is focused on business customers. As of mid-2025, Anthropic had a larger market share of enterprise users, according to Menlo Ventures.

Claude Code performing the function it was initially built for: software development. ANTHROPIC

Both AI darlings have been in the shadow of Google of late, as the search giant roared ahead in the race with an impressive AI model and tool suite of its own. But that isn't stopping those in the know from fixating on Anthropic's latest.

Claude's total web audience more than doubled in December from the previous year, and its daily unique visitors on desktop are up 12% globally year-to-date compared with last month, according to market intelligence companies Similarweb and Sensor Tower, respectively.

Duca said he had been planning to hire new software engineers at his company but decided not to. He thinks Claude Code makes him five times more productive.

Unlike most app- or web-bound chatbots now in wide use, it can operate autonomously, with broad access to user files, a web browser and other applications. While technologists have predicted a coming era of AI "agents" capable of doing just about

anything for humans, that future has been slow to develop. Using Claude Code was the first time many users interacted with this kind of AI, offering an inkling of what may be in store.

People are using it to analyze federal economic data, recover wedding photos from a corrupted hard drive, build new websites from scratch, answer a barrage of emails or order food. On X, Shopify CEO Tobias Lütke said he used it to build software to analyze a recent MRI he had received.

One person "hooked up a webcam to it and was, like, watching their tomato plants grow," said Boris Cherny, the head of Claude Code. "It's just so different than the AI that came before."

With so many noncoders trying it out, Cherny and his team decided to launch a variation called Cowork. Instead of the MS-DOS-like "command line" interface that the core app has, Cowork displays a more friendly, graphical user interface. They built the product in about 10 days—using Claude Code.

Anthropic, which is expected to go public this year, has long held a strategy oriented around producing AI mastery in coding, followed by "tooling," the capability of an AI system to use different software with limited human intervention. Most benchmarks have long recognized it as the best coding model, and it is also a leading model for tooling, according to a benchmark maintained by researchers at the University of California, Berkeley.

The question for many is what happens next.

"The bigger story here is going to be when this goes beyond software engineering," said David Hsu, chief executive of Retool, a business-AI startup. Software engineers make up a tiny fraction of the U.S. labor force. "How far does it go?"

Write to Bradley Olson at bradley.olson@wsj.com