

The Agent-Washing Detector: 5 questions to ask any 'AI agent' vendor

Gartner estimated in mid-2025 that of thousands of self-described agentic vendors, only about 130 offered real agentic capability. Ask these five questions before you sign anything.

1 Can it take an action in a system I already use, end to end?

Good answer: a live demo inside YOUR calendar, CRM or ticketing tool.

Evasive answer: "integrations are on the roadmap" / a demo in their sandbox only.

2 What happens when it's not sure?

Good answer: confidence thresholds, explicit escalation rules, human handoff you can configure.

Evasive answer: "it's very accurate" - accuracy claims instead of a handoff design.

3 Show me a failure log.

Good answer: real examples of things it got wrong, plus what was changed afterwards.

Evasive answer: "we don't really see failures" - every system fails; hiding it means no monitoring.

4 What does it cost when my volume doubles?

Good answer: a formula you can compute yourself (per task / per resolution / per seat).

Evasive answer: "let's revisit at renewal" - surprise pricing is part of the product.

5 What do humans still handle after 6 months?

Good answer: a specific list: emotional calls, judgment calls, exceptions, approvals.

Evasive answer: "eventually nothing" - nobody honest promises full replacement.

Scoring: 4-5 good = real agent vendor. 2-3 = pilot narrowly. 0-1 = chatbot in a trench coat.