

AI AGENTS · BUYER'S TEST

Agent or Chatbot? Find Out in 15 Minutes.

Almost every AI product is now sold as an agent. Five test calls, three screens to see and a 24 point scorecard tell you which ones can actually finish the job.

Gartner calls it **agent washing**: chatbots and older automation rebadged as AI agents. It estimates only about 130 of thousands of vendors claiming agentic AI actually offer it.

■ Three products, one label

Type	What it does	Who finishes the job
Chatbot	Answers questions, sends links	The customer, or your staff later
Assistant	Transcribes, summarises, drafts	A person, with better notes
Operational agent	Books, changes, confirms, records	The agent, on the call

■ The five call test

- 1 **The easy question.** "What time do you close Saturday?" Baseline only.
- 2 **The booking.** Real times offered, details confirmed, text promised.
- 3 **The change, with a twist.** Move it and add an item from the same number.
- 4 **The question it cannot know.** It should take a message, not invent.
- 5 **"Can I talk to a person?"** Transfer with details, or a stated callback.

Then check the finish line

Open the calendar, your texts and the call log. If the calendar is untouched, it was a chatbot, however good the conversation sounded.

■ Reading the price

- **Per minute** rewards long calls. A slow agent costs more.
- **Per resolution or flat** lines up with you, if "resolved" means the job was done.
- **Setup and integration** is where quotes hide cost. Ask if it is included.
- **A second number or forwarding** adds cost and a point of failure.

■ Three things to see behind the demo

- The tool list: which systems, and read only or create and change.
- The action log: what it did on each call.
- The handover rules: settings you control, not promises.

■ The 24 point scorecard (0 to 3 each)

Check	What earns a 3
1 Books into a real calendar	Booking appeared during the call
2 Changes a booking	Moved it, no duplicate
3 Confirms before it commits	Read back, waited for yes
4 Sends the confirmation	Text with correct details
5 Admits what it does not know	Took a message
6 Hands over cleanly	Transfer or callback, details passed
7 Leaves a record	Transcript, summary, outcome
8 You control the rules	Hours, handover, never-say list

■ Why projects fail

- Gartner: **over 40%** of agentic AI projects cancelled by end of 2027.
- Too broad a start, too many connections.
- Measuring deflection, not resolution.

■ Keep a person on

- Complaints and disputes.
- Quotes for unseen work.
- Emergencies and anything a caller asks a human for.

Scores in plain terms

0 to 10: a chatbot. **11 to 18:** part way, check checks 1, 2 and 4. **19 to 24:** an operational agent. Zero on the booking checks means chatbot, whatever the total.