

How Many Companies Sit Between You and the Model?

Almost no business can answer that question about the AI it already uses, and it is not a technical question, it is a procurement one.

Count the companies between you and the model. It is usually three or four: the application you log into, your supplier's own middleware, the model API, and the cloud infrastructure underneath. Each has its own retention policy and jurisdiction; **you inherit all of them and can telephone one.** A demonstration cannot tell two suppliers apart, because it demonstrates the model and the model is the same model. **Middleware is where the surprises are**, queues, caches, retry buffers and error logs containing payloads all belong to your supplier and are almost never documented. **Model provider commitments attach to the contract holder, not to you.** The zero-data-retention arrangements announced in August 2026 are genuine and say nothing about what your supplier does either side of that API call.

■ The short version

What a demonstration shows	What it cannot show
Transcription accuracy	Where the audio went to be transcribed
How natural the AI agent sounds	What is retained, by whom, for how long
How nice the interface is	Whether anybody at that company can fix a fault in the AI layer
How quickly it responds	What happens when the upstream provider changes its terms
That the feature exists	Whether the supplier can describe their own data flow in one page

■ Also worth knowing

The assumption	The correction
"The model provider does not train on API data, so we are fine."	That commitment runs to the entity holding the API contract, your supplier. It says nothing about what your supplier does with your audio before it goes and after it returns.
"They have certifications."	A certification describes the certified party's controls. It does not flow down a supply chain to you, and your obligations do not flow up it to them.
"It is a huge company, so it is safe."	The size of a company four contracts away is not a control. What matters is what the company you can telephone actually controls.
"Our contract makes them responsible."	Contracts allocate liability between the parties. They do not make your supplier the regulator's counterparty instead of you.

Why layer two is where the problems are

Procurement attention concentrates on layer three, because that is where the recognisable names and the strongest published policies live. But layer two is where a system keeps **retry buffers, error logs containing request payloads, caches and temporary storage**, and it belongs entirely to the company you are paying.

■ Questions the full guide answers

- ☐ How do I find out how many companies handle my business call audio?
- ☐ Why can't I judge an AI provider from a demonstration?
- ☐ Does zero data retention from the AI model provider protect my business?
- ☐ What should I ask an AI provider before signing?
- ☐ How should I compare the answers from different AI providers?
- ☐ Is owning your own infrastructure actually better for AI?
- ☐ Which AI compliance obligations stay with my business?

This is the summary. The guide has the detail.

Every point above is worked through in full on our site, with the Australian context, the numbers and the exceptions. If you would rather talk it through, call **1300 663 222** or visit vocphone.com/about/contact-us.