



ASCENDEA

AI / BUSINESS GROWTH / CHECKLIST

AI Agency Client-Readiness Checklist

A UK-focused practical checklist for defining a responsible AI-services offer, preparing compliant outreach and controlling pilot delivery before pursuing client work.



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Chapter links and PDF bookmarks support navigation. Writing areas are for handwritten or separate notes, not interactive PDF forms.

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A practical pre-outreach and pilot-readiness checklist for UK SME founders and responsible AI service providers

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Use this checklist to turn a broad AI-services idea into a focused, lawful and deliverable offer. It does **not** guarantee a first client, income, meeting or conversion. Treat an unchecked item as a decision, piece of evidence or safeguard to complete before you proceed.

How to use this checklist

- ☐ Set a review date: _____. Complete the sections in order and keep the supporting notes with your business records.
- ☐ Mark an item only when you can point to evidence, a written decision or a completed action—not because it sounds sensible.
- ☐ Pause outreach if the offer, data handling, permissions, pricing assumptions or legal basis are not ready.
- ☐ Change the checklist when evidence changes. Do not widen the service merely because a new tool becomes available.

1. Choose one initial service model and a manageable stack

Pick a model you can deliver responsibly

Start with a service you can explain, test and support. A focused first offer is easier for a buyer to understand and safer for you to deliver than a collection of unrelated capabilities.

- ☐ I have selected **one** initial model for a defined review period ending: _____.
- ☐ My model is one of the following, or an equally clear alternative: workflow automation; AI-assisted marketing with editorial oversight; a permission-aware AI application or assistant; or AI assessment and advisory.

- ☐ I have named the buyer group, process owner and one process I understand: _____.
- ☐ I have recorded the experience or evidence that makes this work credible: _____.
- ☐ I have listed the skills, security knowledge or sector expertise I lack, and named a partner or learning step where needed: _____.
- ☐ I have written a **do-not-sell-yet** list, including work that could create high consequences without appropriate expertise. Examples include autonomous medical triage, legal advice, lending decisions and unsupervised hiring decisions.
- ☐ I can describe the workflow in plain English: where information comes from, what the system does, who checks it, what it must not do and what happens when it fails.

Fictional example. A former operations manager offers AI-assisted classification of incoming maintenance enquiries for small facilities-management firms. The first service creates an internal routing recommendation. Urgent or unclear cases go to a named person; the system does not send customer messages or alter a job record.

Build the minimum viable stack around the work

Choose capabilities, not a fashionable list of brands. A single platform may cover more than one capability.

- ☐ I have chosen only the tools needed for the initial offer: AI/model capability, workflow or integration capability, contact/pipeline tracking, project work, invoicing/payment and secure documentation where relevant.
- ☐ For each tool, I have checked the provider's current feature documentation, data terms, access controls, usage limits, support arrangements and actual price. I have not treated an illustrative budget as a quote.
- ☐ I have recorded who owns each account, who can administer it and what happens if the engagement ends.
- ☐ I have separated client environments where appropriate and have restricted each integration, API key and user account to the minimum permissions required.
- ☐ I will not place passwords, API keys, client secrets, personal data beyond the agreed purpose or confidential documents into public chat tools or unapproved prompts.
- ☐ My demonstration uses authorised, minimised or synthetic data. I have not used one client's confidential material to demonstrate a workflow to another.
- ☐ I have a straightforward manual process if a provider, API or automation platform is unavailable.

If an integration uses OpenAI, do not start from a tutorial based on the Assistants API. OpenAI states that the Assistants API was sunset on 26 August 2026 and directs new integrations to the Responses API.³

Make the public description match the decision

- ☐ My LinkedIn headline, website bio and email signature name the buyer and problem rather than claiming to serve every business with AI.
- ☐ My wording is accurate for my stage. If I am validating a new service, I say so; I do not imply client outcomes or experience I cannot substantiate.
- ☐ I can give a brief explanation of the service without jargon: _____.

2. Define and test a buyer–problem focus

Use a positioning sentence to make the offer testable, not to make it sound grand.

I help **[specific buyer]** improve **[specific process or observable outcome]** using **[a capability I can deliver]**, with **[a clear safeguard or boundary]**.

- ☐ I have written my sentence: _____.
- ☐ I can name at least three real organisations that plausibly fit the buyer description, without claiming they are prospects or clients.
- ☐ I have identified the process owner, likely budget owner and any other person who needs to approve a change.
- ☐ The outcome is observable in a unit the buyer already understands, such as time spent, queues resolved, rework, response delays or approved enquiries. I have not asserted a percentage improvement before measuring a baseline.
- ☐ I can explain the technical approach in three sentences a non-technical buyer can repeat.
- ☐ I have spoken with, or arranged conversations with, relevant people to learn about the last time the problem occurred, the existing workaround, its consequence, approvals and reasons a pilot might be rejected.
- ☐ I distinguish evidence from assumption in my notes. Interest is not a purchase decision.
- ☐ I will obtain permission before using an identifiable person's comments, company name, logo or data in marketing.

Fictional example. “I help small facilities-management firms route maintenance enquiries to the appropriate internal team using AI-assisted classification, with human review for urgent and unclear requests.” This is a working hypothesis. It is not a performance claim.

3. Package an offer that stands on its own

A practical starting sequence is **Assess** → **Pilot** → **Support**. Each stage should deliver value on its own; the client should not have to buy the next stage to receive what was promised.

Assessment

- ☐ My assessment reviews one agreed process and states the evidence I will use.
- ☐ Its deliverables are clear—for example, a process map, baseline assumptions, candidate options, dependencies and a recommendation that may include a non-AI solution.
- ☐ I have stated what the assessment cannot establish and how I will report uncertainty.

Bounded pilot

- ☐ My pilot addresses one use case in an agreed environment. I have stated whether it is a demonstration, a limited live trial or a production-ready deployment.
- ☐ I have defined supported inputs, outputs, integrations, access permissions, human review, tests and a manual fallback.
- ☐ I have listed exclusions and prohibited actions. “Full automation” is not an accurate description where a responsible design needs human approval.
- ☐ I have named the acceptance evidence and the client reviewer who will assess it.

Ongoing support

- ☐ I offer support only where monitoring, issue handling, provider/model changes, reporting or agreed improvements create a genuine need.
- ☐ I have separated maintenance from new development and stated included activities, response arrangements, exclusions, third-party costs and pricing for extra work.
- ☐ I have allowed capacity for the obligations I offer. A retainer is continuing work, not passive income.

Write and test the one-page offer

- ☐ My one-page offer names the intended buyer, problem, deliverables, included work, exclusions, client responsibilities, timeline assumptions, pause conditions, price basis, third-party costs, VAT treatment to confirm, success criteria and next step.
- ☐ I use a fixed price only where the discovery assumptions make it defensible. Otherwise I state what must be confirmed before quoting.
- ☐ I have a simple public service menu or reusable follow-up summary that does not hide important conditions. I do not publish a price that I cannot honour under the stated scope.

- ☐ I have rehearsed an honest answer to “What do you sell?” that names the outcome, scope and boundary—not an inflated technology claim.
- ☐ I have prepared a proportionate response to out-of-scope requests: explain the impact, offer a written option with cost and timing, and keep the original work focused unless the client approves a change.

4. Ground the price in evidence, delivery cost and uncertainty

Value helps a buyer decide whether the work is worthwhile. It is not the same as cash saving, profit or a universal pricing formula.

Record a conservative value hypothesis

- ☐ I have recorded the current task volume, time, owner, failure or delay consequence, evidence source and observation period.
- ☐ I have written an outcome statement that distinguishes a target from a measured result:
_____.
- ☐ I have separated gross capacity value from realised cash benefit. Time released is not automatically a payroll saving or revenue increase.
- ☐ I have stated how the client could realistically use released capacity, if that is part of the case.
- ☐ I have included recurring software, API, hosting, telephony, support and human-review costs, and stated who pays them.

Illustrative planning arithmetic—not a forecast, price recommendation or client promise. If a client estimates that a task takes 10 hours a week, a pilot may aim to reduce it by 4 hours, the assumed blended cost is £25 an hour and the planning year is 48 working weeks, the gross annual capacity figure is $4 \times £25 \times 48 = £4,800$. If recurring costs are £100 a month, the simplified remaining capacity-value figure is £3,600 before implementation and other costs. The client must still validate whether any capacity can be realised.

Calculate your delivery cost floor

- ☐ I have estimated discovery, build, test, documentation, feedback, handover, support, subcontracting and direct tool costs.
- ☐ I have included a realistic contingency for rework, delayed client dependencies and usage variance.
- ☐ I have tested a reduced-benefit, higher-usage and delivery-overrun scenario.

- ☐ I have confirmed that the proposed fee, payment timing and scope cover my actual capacity and obligations. My internal cost floor is: _____.
- ☐ I have not applied a universal percentage of “annual value”, a copied hourly-rate threshold or a blanket custom-work multiplier as if it proves a fair price.
- ☐ I have checked whether the quoted amount is inclusive or exclusive of VAT where applicable and will obtain appropriate tax advice if unsure.

Use AI only as a bounded drafting aid

Use the following prompt only with anonymised, non-confidential facts you are permitted to use. It is for an internal draft, not an automated price decision.

You are helping me prepare an internal scope-and-pricing draft for a UK AI-services pilot.

Use only the facts below. Do not invent client results, market rates, legal conclusions, security guarantees, savings, or a final price. Flag missing evidence and assumptions.

INPUT BOUNDARIES

- Do not include passwords, API keys, personal data not needed for the task, or confidential client documents.
- Treat all figures as illustrative until checked against my own costs and the client's evidence.

FACTS I AM ALLOWED TO PROVIDE

Buyer and process: [insert]

Supported inputs and outputs: [insert]

Exclusions and prohibited actions: [insert]

Client responsibilities and dependencies: [insert]

Estimated delivery activities, hours and direct costs: [insert]

Known risks, human review and fallback: [insert]

Produce: (1) a concise scope summary; (2) assumptions and questions to resolve; (3) cost and risk items I must review; and (4) a plain-English change-control sentence.

Do not contact anyone, send anything, access systems or make decisions.

- ☐ A named human has checked the draft against the client evidence, my costs, permissions and contract position before I use it.
- ☐ I have removed any invented claim, sensitive input or unsupported recommendation from the final client-facing text.

5. Prepare sales operations before outreach

- ☐ I have a pipeline record with consistent stages, such as: researched, contacted, replied, qualified conversation, assessment/proposal, decision and closed. I can distinguish new contacts from follow-ups.
- ☐ I record the date, source, lawful outreach route, contact status, objection/opt-out status, next action and outcome without collecting unnecessary personal data.
- ☐ I have set a sustainable recurring block for research, tailored outreach, follow-up and pipeline review that does not overlap with promised client delivery: _____.
- ☐ I have prepared an invoice template with my business details, payment terms, VAT treatment where relevant and the agreed scope or reference.
- ☐ I have tested my payment and invoicing process using an appropriate internal test and verified who receives payment notifications. I do not use a client payment as a system test.
- ☐ I have a statement-of-work template that covers deliverables, assumptions, dependencies, price, payment dates, acceptance criteria, change control, support boundaries, account/asset ownership and what happens if work pauses or stops.
- ☐ I understand that a one-page scope summary is helpful but is not automatically a complete contract. I will obtain suitable legal advice for terms, liability, data-processing and sector-specific requirements.

6. Make UK outreach lawful, truthful and relevant

The ICO distinguishes **corporate subscribers**—including companies, LLPs, Scottish partnerships and certain public bodies—from **individual subscribers**, which include sole traders and some non-limited partnerships. The PECR rule for direct marketing by electronic mail does not apply to corporate subscribers, but it does apply to individual subscribers. The UK GDPR can still apply when you process identifiable business-contact data. The ICO also says this guidance is under review following changes made by the Data (Use and Access) Act, so recheck it before a campaign.¹

Classify the recipient and record the route

- ☐ For every proposed recipient, I have recorded whether the subscriber is corporate or individual. If the status is uncertain, I will verify it or use the more protective route.
- ☐ I do not treat a publicly visible email address, a LinkedIn profile or a connection acceptance as general permission to send marketing.
- ☐ For corporate email or text marketing, I identify my business honestly, do not conceal my identity, give a valid opt-out address and screen new outreach against my suppression list.¹

- ☐ For a sole trader or relevant partnership, I obtain valid consent before electronic marketing unless I have confirmed that a PECR exception applies to the specific activity. I do not assume corporate B2B rules apply.
- ☐ Where I process a named business contact's personal data, I have documented an appropriate lawful basis, provided the required privacy information and applied data-minimisation and retention controls.¹
- ☐ I honour a marketing objection or withdrawal of consent without delay and update the suppression record before further outreach.
- ☐ I treat direct messages that are stored electronically as potential electronic mail for PECR purposes; I do not use social-platform automation to evade the rules.¹
- ☐ I have separately checked the rules, TPS/CTPS screening and objections for live calls, and the consent requirements for automated marketing calls. I will not assume email rules cover voice outreach.

Run a truth and relevance check before sending

- ☐ I can point to a genuine, non-sensitive reason the message is relevant to this recipient.
- ☐ I do not use a false "Re:" subject line, a fabricated connection, an invented result, an unapproved logo or a claim that the person has been referred by someone else.
- ☐ I offer a proportionate next step, such as a short problem conversation or a clearly scoped assessment—not a pressure tactic.
- ☐ My message identifies me, my business and a route to object or opt out as appropriate.
- ☐ I have arranged a limited, relevant follow-up approach and a stop rule. I stop when a person objects, opts out or says the approach is not relevant.

Adaptable sample message—use only if accurate and lawful for the recipient.

Subject: A question about [genuine process] at [Company]

Hello [Name], I noticed [a genuine, relevant observation]. I am testing a focused service that helps [specific business type] improve [process] using [capability], with [human-review boundary]. Is [process] a current issue for your team? If it is useful, I can outline a small assessment. If it is not relevant, please let me know and I will not follow up.

[Your name, business identity, contact details and privacy/opt-out information as appropriate]

- ☐ I have tailored the bracketed wording honestly, completed the compliance details and had a human read the final message before sending.

7. Qualify the opportunity and control the scope

- ☐ In discovery, I ask about the current process, baseline, consequence of failure, systems, permitted data, decision owner, budget process, timetable and reasons not to proceed.
- ☐ I listen for a reason to decline or narrow the work. A prospect is not a fit merely because I have capacity.
- ☐ I agree a specific next step: an assessment, a scoped proposal, another stakeholder conversation or a decision to stop.
- ☐ Before starting a pilot, I have a written scope record that names the single intended outcome, deliverables, supported inputs, exclusions, client responsibilities, dependencies, acceptance evidence and change-control route.
- ☐ I have agreed actual dates and pause conditions. Any delivery window is an assumption, not a guarantee; access, approvals, procurement and security work may change it.
- ☐ I have stated whether the proposed work is a demonstration, a limited trial or a production deployment.
- ☐ I will obtain suitable contractual terms before taking on legal, security, data-protection, regulated or other material obligations beyond my competence.

8. Prove pilot safety and operability before release

A polished demonstration is not production proof. The ICO's AI guidance covers accountability and governance, transparency, lawfulness, accuracy, fairness, security/data minimisation and individual rights. Its guidance is also under review; use the current official material and obtain specialist advice for the circumstances.²

Define safe operation before build

- ☐ I have identified the authorised purpose, permitted data, client and provider roles, retention/deletion expectations and access boundaries.
- ☐ I have checked whether a data protection impact assessment or specialist review is needed before processing begins.
- ☐ I have named the human reviewer, what they must check, when they must intervene and the realistic review workload.
- ☐ I have restricted tools and permissions to the specific task. The system cannot send externally, alter material records, grant discounts, give regulated advice or take another consequential action unless that authority is expressly designed, authorised and tested.

- ☐ I have provided a manual fallback, a way to disable or roll back the workflow and a named owner for each.
- ☐ I have explained the AI's role, limits and human escalation route to the people who need to operate it.

Test the whole workflow, not only the happy path

- ☐ I have agreed representative, permitted test cases, including common cases, edge cases, malformed inputs, ambiguous requests, unavailable APIs, duplicate events and unsafe-action attempts.
- ☐ I have retained some appropriate test cases from refinement so I can check performance on held-out examples.
- ☐ I record expected results, sample selection, failures, corrections, review time, escalations, costs and residual risks. A small successful demonstration does not establish a universal accuracy rate.
- ☐ I have tested that a user cannot retrieve information outside their authorisation and that untrusted text in an email or document cannot override the workflow's permitted task.
- ☐ I have tested that retries do not create repeated consequential actions.
- ☐ I have verified the manual route and failure notification, rather than assuming the fallback exists.
- ☐ I have prepared a concise operating guide covering permitted use, monitoring, support, troubleshooting, account ownership, data boundaries and how to stop the workflow.
- ☐ I have a documented release decision: accept the pilot, extend testing, revise the scope or stop. A pilot acceptance is not a blanket compliance certification or automatic authority for wider live release.

9. Final go/no-go record

- ☐ **Go:** every applicable item above is evidenced, all material risks have an owner and the proposed next action is within my capability and agreed scope.
- ☐ **Pause:** any missing lawful outreach condition, unclear personal-data use, absent client permission, untested consequential action, unsupported claim or unavailable human fallback stops the next step until resolved.
- ☐ **Narrow:** where the benefit is plausible but the risk or uncertainty is too high, I have reduced the use case to an internal, supervised or non-AI alternative.
- ☐ **Refer:** where specialist legal, security, data-protection or sector expertise is required, I have identified an appropriate adviser or delivery partner instead of improvising.
- ☐ **Next action, owner and date:** _____.
- ☐ **Evidence still needed:** _____.

☐ **Next review date:** _____.

Use and education notice

This is general, non-clinical business education. It is not legal, tax, financial, data-protection, security or other professional advice. Recheck official guidance and provider documentation before implementation, and use appropriately qualified advisers where required.

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References and verification

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