

The AI Agent *Starter Kit.*

*A field guide for small-business owners
considering — and dreading — their first build.*

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“Most AI proposals are written for people who already know what an agent is. This one is written for everyone else.”

OPENING

**A chatbot
answers
questions.**

*An agent
does work.*

That distinction is the entire game.



CHAPTER 01

What an agent actually is.

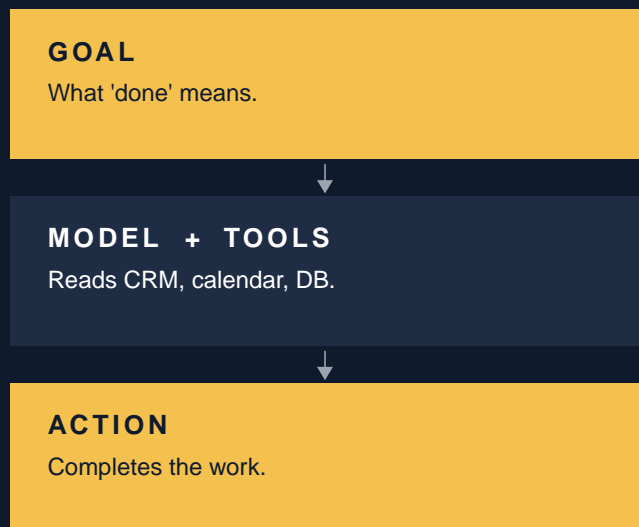
An AI agent is software that takes a goal — book the appointment, qualify the lead, draft the contract, reconcile the invoice — and uses a language model plus tools (your CRM, your calendar, your database) to actually complete that goal end-to-end.

Not a Q&A box. A coworker that ships.

If you've used ChatGPT, you've used a chatbot. If you've watched it book a flight, fill a spreadsheet, or send an email on its own — that was an agent.

The difference isn't the model. It's whether it can act.

ANATOMY



Every agent has these three. If a 'tool' you're being sold doesn't, it's a chatbot wearing makeup.

CHAPTER 02

Five things small businesses use them for.



01 — DENTAL & VETERINARY

Front-desk overflow agent.

Answers the phone when you can't, books appointments straight into your existing calendar, asks the qualifying questions a receptionist would, and texts the patient the confirmation. Deflects 60–80% of routine calls without touching your team.

02 — LAW & ACCOUNTING

Intake-and-qualify agent.

Talks to prospective clients on your site or via voice, captures the matter type, conflicts-checks against your existing book, and only routes to a human when the case is in-scope. Replaces the lead form that nobody fills out.

03 — E-COMMERCE

Returns and order-status agent.

Reads your Shopify, answers 'where's my order' instantly, processes returns within policy, escalates exceptions with full context. The hidden tax of your support inbox, gone.

04 — INDIE SAAS

Onboarding-and-activation agent.

Watches new sign-ups, detects when they stall, reaches out at the right moment with the right answer pulled from your docs. Activation goes up. CAC payback shortens.

05 — ALL OF THE ABOVE

Internal ops agent.

Reads your meeting notes, your CRM, your shared drive. Finds the contract, drafts the proposal, formats the report. The thing your assistant would do — except it costs \$50 a month, not \$5,000.

Pick the one that hurts most.

If two are tempting, build the painful one first. The exciting one second. Pain pays for the project; excitement gets it abandoned.

CHAPTER 03 · WORKBOOK

Seven questions before you build.

Take the page out, take a pen, answer in the margin. The seven questions that separate a build that pays for itself in 90 days from one that quietly gets abandoned.

01 What single, repetitive task do I most dread?

Start where the pain is, not where the hype is.

02 If this agent disappeared overnight, what would break?

If the answer is 'nothing,' don't build it.

03 What systems must it read from? Write to?

List them now. Each is a 'tool' the agent will need.

04 What can it NEVER do, no matter what?

Refunds beyond policy? Discount promises? Write the rules first.

05 How will I know if it's working?

One number, measurable weekly. Calls deflected. Hours saved. Pick one.

06 What's my budget if it's wrong?

Build small enough that being wrong is survivable.

07 Who owns the code when it ships?

If the answer is 'the agency,' you're building leverage for someone else's business.

CHAPTER 04

What it actually costs.



Most agency proposals for AI work read like ransom notes. They aren't. Here's what fair pricing looks like in 2026, broken into the two costs every project has.

DEEPLATHE AI AGENT — Q2 2026 LAUNCH PRICING (50% OFF)

TIER	Q2 2026	STANDARD	DELIVERY
Starter	\$2,900	\$5,800	7 days
Standard •	\$6,200	\$12,400	10 days
Pro	\$12,300	\$24,600	14 days
Enterprise	Custom	Custom	Scoped

• Most popular. Fixed price. You own the code. Q2 prices end June 30, 2026 — locked at standard rate from October 1.

Running cost (ongoing)

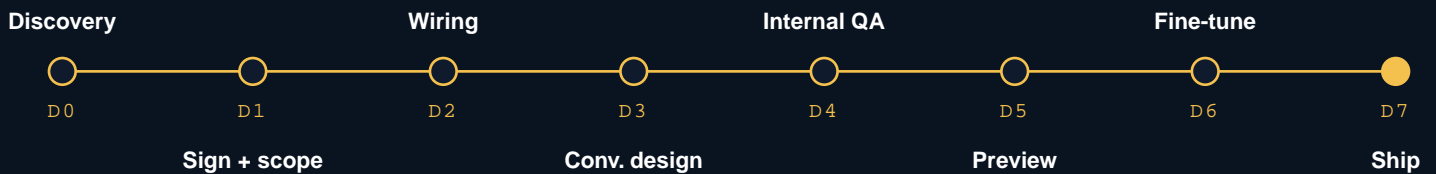
The agent uses APIs to think (Anthropic, OpenAI, Google) and infrastructure to run. These bills go directly to you, never marked up. Typical small-business agent: \$30–\$150/mo. Heavier-volume agents: \$300–\$800/mo.

What you should ask any vendor: 'When the API bill arrives, who pays it, and at what markup?' If the answer is 'us, with markup,' you've found a margin trap.

CHAPTER 05

Anatomy of a 7-day build.

Most agencies take seven weeks because they treat every project like a research lab. We don't. Here's the timeline we run for a Standard-tier AI agent, day by day.



DAY-BY-DAY

- DAY 0 Discovery call — 15 minutes. Pin the goal, the tools, the guardrails. Proposal in your inbox before next morning.
- DAY 1 Sign + scope lock. Brief signed. Scope frozen. Build opens.
- DAY 2 Knowledge base + tool wiring. Reads and writes connected and tested.
- DAY 3 Conversation design + first pass. The agent talks. Probably awkwardly. That's fine.
- DAY 4 Internal QA against the 50 hardest scenarios. Fix what breaks.
- DAY 5 Private preview link. You try it. Real conversations. Real edge cases.
- DAY 6 Fine-tuning round. Tone, escalation rules, polish. One round. Focused.
- DAY 7 Ship. Live. Code transferred to your repo. Hosting handed off (or we manage it). Done.

Most agencies take
seven weeks.

We don't.

Pre-defined builds. AI-assisted development. Scope locked before code is written. The timeline collapses without sacrificing quality. That's the trade.



CHAPTER 06

Five red flags in AI proposals.

01 Hourly billing.

Translation: 'we don't know how long this takes, so the risk is yours.' The whole point of this technology is leverage. If your agency charges by the hour, they don't believe in their own tools.

02 They won't tell you the model.

If you can't get a straight answer about whether you're running on Claude, GPT, Gemini, or open-source — you're being managed, not consulted.

03 Marked-up API costs.

If your monthly bill includes 'AI usage' as a line-item with a margin, you're paying twice for the same tokens. APIs should pass through at cost, always.

04 No code ownership clause.

Search the contract for 'ownership' and 'IP.' If the code lives in their account, on their hosting, with no transfer rights — you're renting, not building.

05 Demos that don't run on your data.

Anyone can build a demo on synthetic data. The hard part is your data. If a vendor refuses a paid scoping run on a real slice of your stack, they don't trust their own work.

CHAPTER 07

The ROI math that actually works.

Every business case for an AI agent reduces to one of three formulas. Run the one that matches your situation. If none of them produce a number larger than the build cost, the project isn't ready.

FORMULA A

Replacing a task you already pay for

`hours/wk × loaded labour cost × 52 = annual savings`

Divide build cost by annual savings = months to payback. Over 18 months? Scope smaller.

FORMULA B

Capturing leads you currently lose

`missed/mo × conv. rate × LTV × 12 = recovered revenue`

This number is almost always larger than people think — they undercount the missed.

FORMULA C

Faster cycle time

`days saved × cycles/yr × rev/cycle × margin = uplift`

Works for any business where speed compounds: agencies, construction, e-com ops.

The 90-day rule

If an agent doesn't pay for itself within 90 days of going live, the scope was wrong, not the technology. Pick a smaller, more painful problem and try again.

CHAPTER 08

Guardrails that hold.

An agent without guardrails is a liability with a chat interface. Every production agent should have these four layers. No exceptions.

LAYER 01

Hard stops

Things the agent literally cannot do — issue refunds over a threshold, make legal claims, change pricing. Enforced in code, not in prompts.

LAYER 02

Escalation rules

Specific, named scenarios where the agent must hand off to a human. 'Customer says the word lawyer' is a valid rule. So is 'order over \$5,000.'

LAYER 03

Data isolation

What the agent can read about one customer must never leak into another's conversation. Tested, not trusted.

LAYER 04

Audit trail

Every conversation logged. Every action recorded. Searchable. Otherwise you can't debug, can't comply, can't sleep.

CHAPTER 09

Who shouldn't build one. Yet.

We will tell you 'no' on the discovery call if any of these apply. We'd rather lose a sale than ship a build that hurts your business.

01

No written process

You don't have a documented version of the work the agent would do. An agent built on tribal knowledge encodes the chaos.

02

Broken upstream data

Your CRM, calendar, or order data is broken or inconsistent. An agent will surface every inconsistency at scale.

03

The wrong reason

You're chasing 'AI' because investors or peers expect it. The wrong reason produces the wrong build, every time.

04

No internal owner

Your team is already at capacity launching three other things. New software needs an owner. Without one it dies on the vine.

05

The volume isn't there

If you handle 10 calls a week, automating them is a vanity project. Wait until 100.

If any of these are true, fix them first. We're happy to help you scope what 'fixing them first' looks like — also free, also a 15-minute call.

CHAPTER 10 · WORKBOOK

The pre-build checklist.

10

Print this. Tick the boxes. If you can't tick all ten, you're not ready — and that's not bad news. It's the cheapest insight in this entire document.

- I can name the single task this agent will do.
- I know how I'll measure whether it's working (one number, weekly).
- I have a written description of how a human currently does this work.
- I have a list of every system the agent must read from.
- I have a list of every system the agent must write to.
- I have a written list of things the agent must never do.
- I have a budget for being wrong, and it's survivable.
- I have a person on my team who owns this — not just sponsors it.
- I'm comfortable owning the code and the API costs once it ships.
- I've talked to one person whose business uses one. (If you haven't, book a call. We'll connect you.)

CLOSING

Ready to build?



If you got this far, you're in the top 5% of operators thinking about this. Most people will read this kit and do nothing. Don't be most people.

01 Book a 15-minute build call.

Free. No-pressure. We'll talk through what you'd build, what it'd cost, and whether 7 days is realistic. If it's not, we'll tell you.

› deeplathe.com/start

02 See full pricing.

Every product line, every tier, every bundle. Q2 2026 prices end June 30. Standard pricing locks October 1.

› deeplathe.com/pricing

03 Just email us.

If a call feels heavy, write us. One paragraph about the task you'd want automated. We reply within a business day, every time.

› hello@deeplathe.com

This kit is free and will stay free. If it helped, share it with one operator who'd benefit. That's the only ask.