

Questions to Ask Before You Buy Any AI Tool

Most AI tools are easy to buy. These questions are how you find out whether you should. If you cannot answer them yet, you are not ready to buy yet.

01 Start with the problem

What business problem are we solving, in one sentence?

If we cannot write that sentence, we are not ready to buy.

How will we know it worked?

Pick the number that actually matters. Throughput, not vanity metrics.

02 Governance and accountability

Which decisions does the tool make, and which require a human?

"Human in the loop" means a named person accountable for a defined decision, not a slogan.

When the model is wrong, who answers for it, and how would we even know?

If there is no way to catch the error, there is no governance.

How do we keep a human in the loop at scale without slowing back to pre-AI speed?

If the vendor has no answer for the HOW, keep looking.

03 The vendor

What is this vendor incented to make clear, and what to leave fuzzy?

Not villains. Vendors. Assume they optimize for the sale, not your governance.

Stripped of the buzzwords, what does this do that we cannot already do?

If the answer needs jargon to sound impressive, be skeptical.

What is the real cost after integration, training, and overlapping tools?

The license price is rarely the price.

04 Your people, and the honest answer

Who owns this internally after the vendor walks away?

Your team knows your business better than any model. Name the owner.

How will our people first hear about this, and when?

Bring them in before you buy, not after. Adoption dies when a tool is imposed.

Will the team see this as help, or as a threat to their jobs?

Perception drives adoption. Name what changes, what doesn't, and who says so.

Is AI even the right tool here, or would a simpler fix do?

Sometimes the honest answer is no. That answer is still a win.

Want a second set of eyes before you buy? Start with a Leadership AI Briefing.

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AI helped me draft this. The judgment, the stories, and the scars are mine.