

The Agentic Protocol Landscape

Understanding AG-UI, MCP, A2A, UI Specs,
and how to build agentic applications



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Why Agentic Protocols Matter

AI Agents are becoming the place where user intent turns into action. But how do they connect and communicate with the rest of the ecosystem?

→ Protocols

Agentic Protocols are the language of interoperability between models, tools, apps and users.

How do these protocols work and help?

→ Interoperability →
agents, apps, and
tools speak a
shared format.

→ Transparency →
open standards
instead of
proprietary SDKs.

→ Reusability →
modular, composable
building blocks for
the ecosystem.

Agentic Protocols



AG-UI



MCP



A2A

**Although protocols make agents compatible,
the application layer makes them collaborative.**
(more on this later)

The Current Established Agentic Protocol Ecosystem

The agentic ecosystem is rapidly organizing around a family of open, complementary protocols, each addressing a distinct layer.

You can connect your application to agents directly via AG-UI, MCP, and A2A.

Adopted Standards

Protocol	Maintainer	Purpose
 MCP (Model Context Protocol)	Anthropic / Open Source	Defines structured context/tool access between models and clients.
 AG-UI (Agent-User Interaction)	CopilotKit / Open Source	Connects agentic backends and agentic frontends.
 A2A (Agent-to-Agent)	Google / Open Source	Enables secure messaging and coordination between agents from different frameworks.

These protocols are not competitors, but **complements**, forming a common language for agents, apps, and users.

Handshakes Powering the Ecosystem



AG-UI turns low-level protocol interoperability into application and human-level collaboration.

These handshakes expose protocol activity to users:

- AG-UI ↔ MCP → visualize tool outputs
- AG-UI ↔ A2A → visualize multi-agent collaboration

Read more: [AG-UI Protocol Docs](#) | [Connect MCP Servers](#) | [A2A → Frontend](#)



- **Function:** A2A doesn't let one agent use another agent's MCP tools directly. Instead, it allows agents to **negotiate, exchange goals, or delegate tasks**, and each agent can then use its own MCP connections to act.
- **Outcome:** Enables **multi-agent collaboration**, where agents coordinate and share outcomes, not shared tool access, but shared intent and coordination across systems.

Read more: [MCP ↔ A2A Handshake](#)



Parts of the Ecosystem

The ecosystem has different parts- each defining how agents interact with users, tools, other agents, and UI.

Type	Agentic Protocol	Purpose
Agent ↔ User Interaction	 AG-UI (Agent-User Interaction Protocol)	The open, event-based standard that connects agentic backends/frontends, enabling real-time, multimodal, interactive experiences.
Agent ↔ Tools & Data	 MCP (Model Context Protocol)	Open standard (originated by Anthropic) that lets agents securely connect to external systems- tools, workflows, and data sources.
Agent ↔ Agent	 A2A	Defines how agents coordinate and share work across distributed agentic systems.
Type	Generative UI Spec	Purpose
Agent ↔ Declarative UI	 MCP UI (Anthropic)  Open-JSON-UI (OpenAI)	Declarative, LLM-friendly generative UI specs that define what to render and how to structure agent responses visually.

Unified Takeaway

- AG-UI connects agentic apps to agentic backends.
- MCP connects agents to tools and data.
- A2A connects agents to other agents.
- MCP-UI, and Open-JSON-UI let agents return UIs.

Agent–User Interaction Protocol

AI agents are moving beyond chatbots and into products.

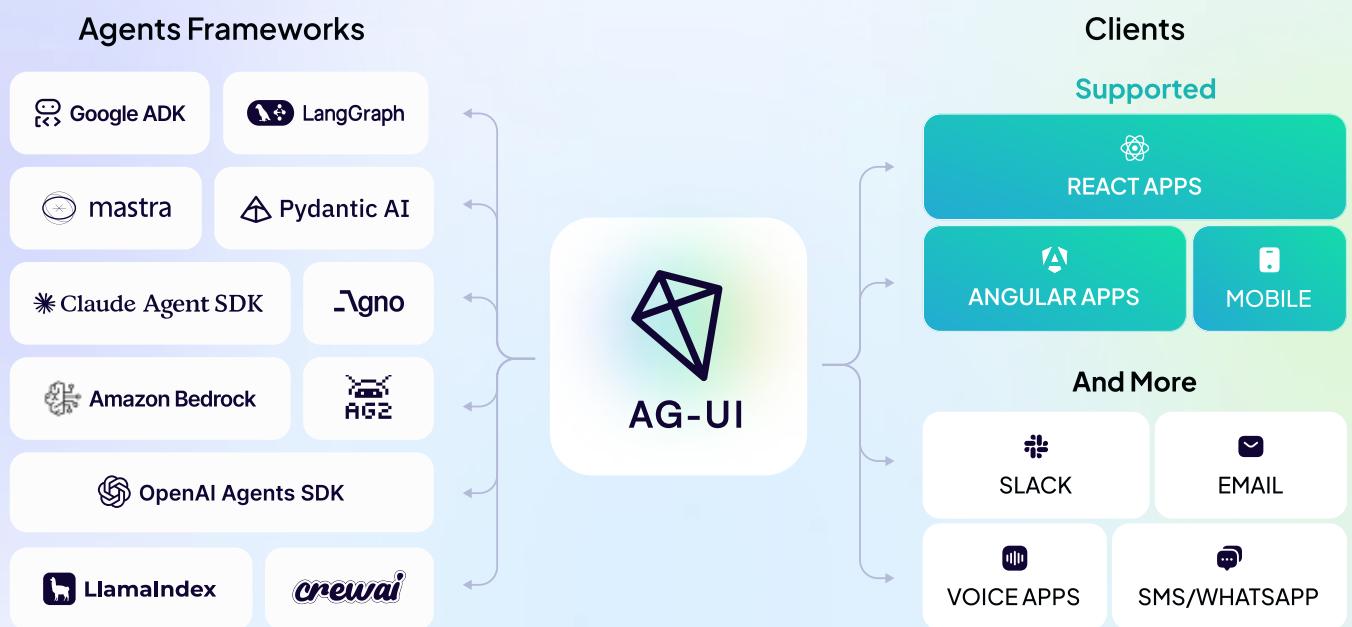
This is what's becoming known as **the application layer** – where users and agents collaborate directly inside interfaces.

→ What is AG-UI's role?

Standardizing how humans & agents collab inside real apps

When intelligence needs to *live inside* an app (updating UI state, responding to user actions, showing reasoning steps, or streaming outputs into a sidebar) you need an application-level protocol → **AG-UI**

AG-UI: a horizontal “N-M” Protocol



Why should I care about AG-UI?

→ It's the fastest-growing protocol in the agent-user domain

Every major platform is moving toward AI-native UX!

Think: Agent as chatbot → **Agent as co-worker inside my app**

AG-UI and Generative UI Specs

Several recently released specs have enabled agents to return generative UI, increasing the power and flexibility of the Agent ↔ User conversation.

MCP-UI and Open-JSON-UI are both **generative UI specifications**. Generative UIs allow agents to respond to users not only with text but also with dynamic UI components.

AG-UI is not a generative UI specification!

- It's an **Agent–User Interaction protocol** that provides the **bi-directional runtime connection** between an agentic backend & frontend.

AG-UI natively supports all of the generative UI specs below and allows developers to define **their own custom generative UI standards** as well.

Current Gen UI Specs Supported by AG-UI

Specification	Origin / Maintainer	Purpose
 Open-JSON-UI	OpenAI	An open standardization of OpenAI's internal declarative Generative UI schema.
 MCP-UI	Microsoft + Shopify	A fully open, iframe-based Generative UI standard extending MCP for user-facing experiences.

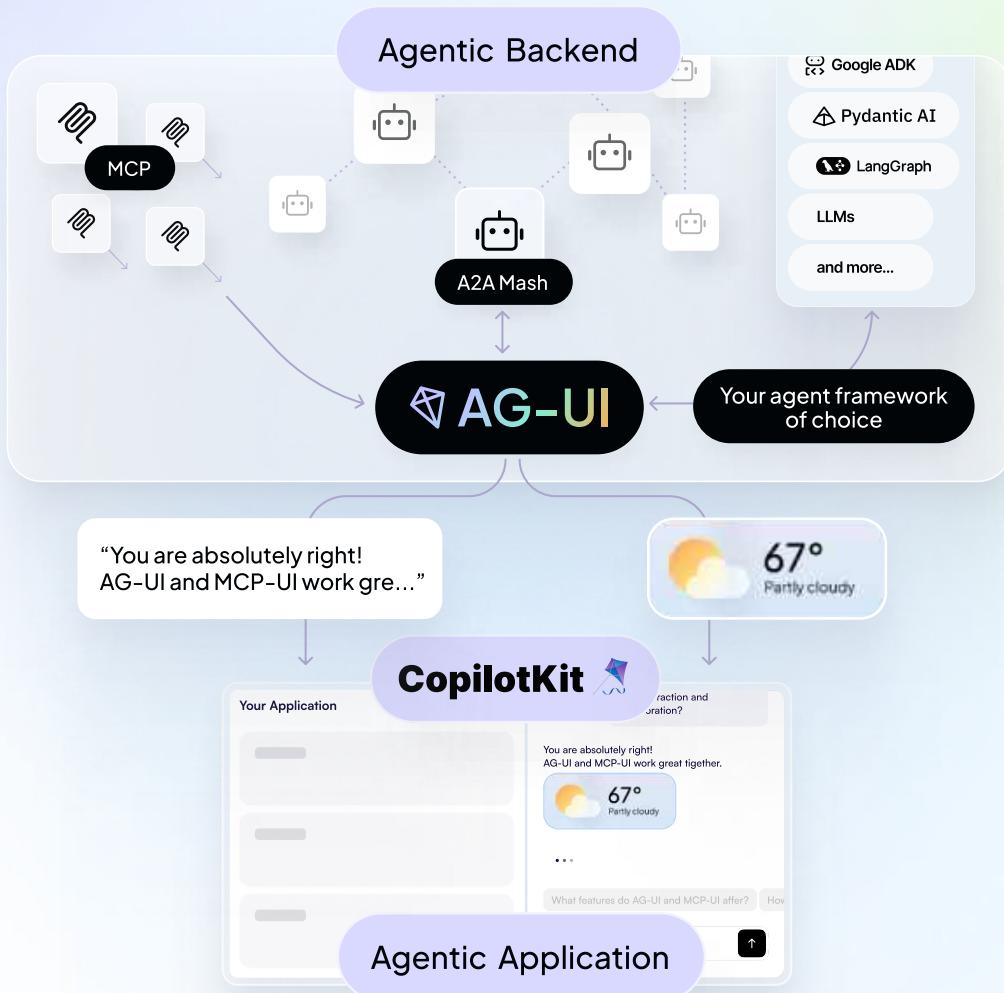
Mixing and Matching

CopilotKit lets developers connect to any of these protocols **directly or in combination**.

AG-UI also includes handshakes with both **MCP** and **A2A**, ensuring smooth interoperability across the full agentic stack.

This means that if your host agent connects to subagents using **MCP** or **A2A**, their UI properties can be propagated all the way through to the user-facing application—while preserving **full security, policy, and observability controls**.

AG-UI is a General Purpose Bi-directional
Agentic Frontend ↔ Agentic Backend Connection



You can think of AG-UI as the “**kitchen sink**” protocol – informed by bottom-up, real-world needs for building best-in-class agentic applications.

Common Misconceptions

Misconception:

AG-UI and MCP-UI are competing standards for agent UIs.



Reality:

Not at all. They serve completely different purposes. MCP-UI is a generative UI specification that defines what the agent should render visually. AG-UI, on the other hand, is an Agent-User Interaction protocol that defines how agents become interactive and stateful inside the product.

Misconception:

Protocols are competing for dominance.



Reality:

They're complementary - each solves a different part of the agent lifecycle. The goal is interoperability, not exclusivity.

Misconception:

Agentic Protocols are just APIs with new branding.



Reality:

APIs connect products; **protocols connect ecosystems.** They define shared schemas, security, and communication rules so independent systems can work together without central control.

Misconception:

AG-UI is a visualization spec like MCP-UI.



Reality:

AG-UI is a User Interaction protocol, not a UI spec. It powers the real-time, bi-directional connection between agents and users, enabling agents to stay stateful, multimodal, and interactive inside the app.

Misconception:

CopilotKit replaces these agentic protocols.



Reality:

CopilotKit **sits above them** as the *Agentic Application Framework*. It unifies AG-UI, MCP, and A2A under one developer-ready layer- so you can build, connect, and operate agentic apps using any or all agentic protocols.

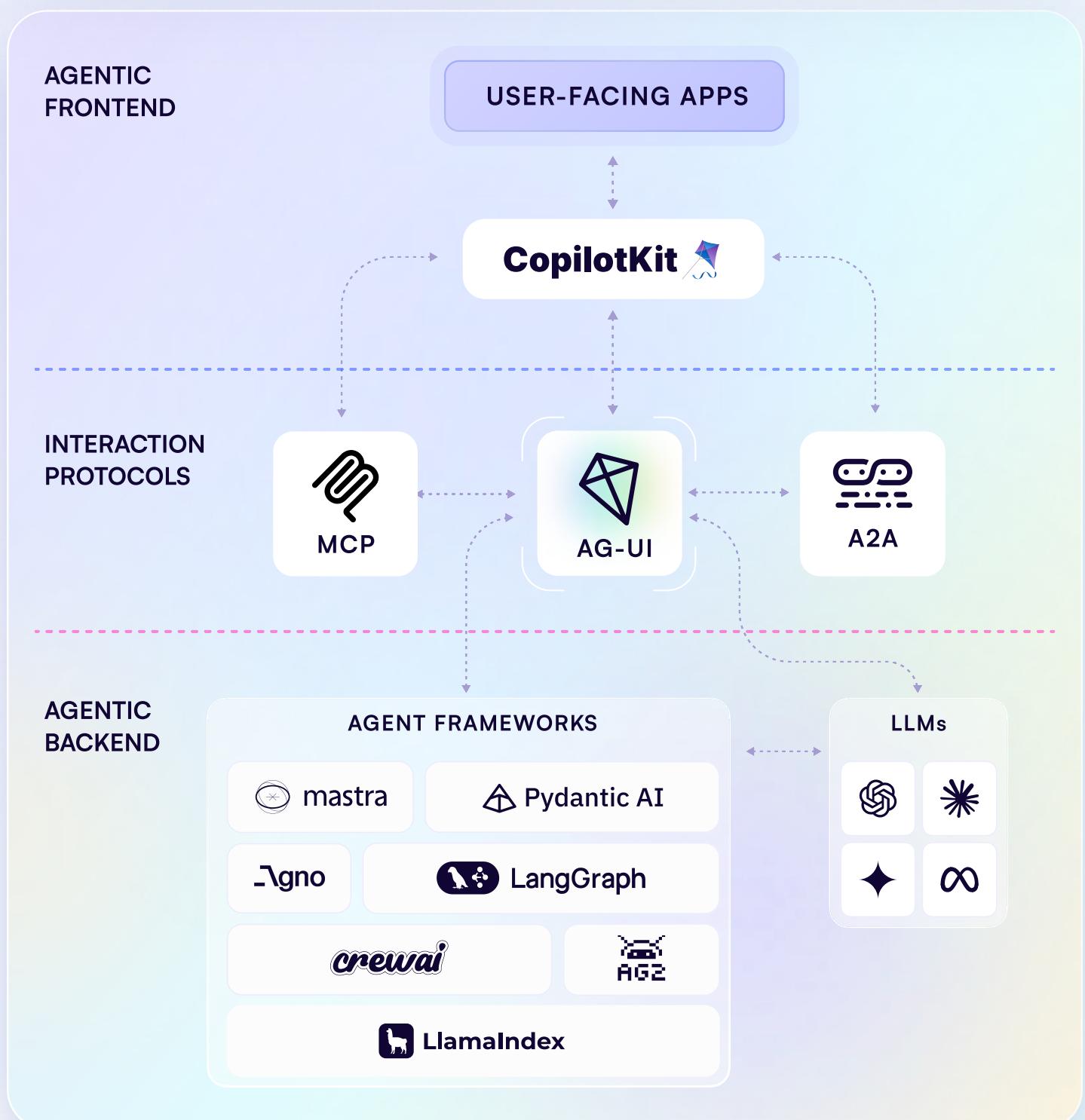
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Ecosystem Overview



Ecosystem Overview

CopilotKit sits above these protocols and generative UI specs as the **Agentic Application Framework**- an open-source and cloud platform that unifies the stack, enabling developers to build and operate production-grade agentic applications with confidence.

- CopilotKit uses any or all of the above, enabling developers to build rich user-facing agentic apps connected to any agentic backend through any of the Agent Interaction Protocols, and using any of the Generative UI Specs.



CopilotKit + AG-UI

The future is multi-protocol composability

Agents will speak many protocols at once.



CopilotKit

- CopilotKit is the **Agentic Application Framework** - everything developers need to integrate AI agents into their user-facing apps.
- CopilotKit-powered agentic apps can connect to any AI agent, either directly or through the Agentic protocol of their choice, including AG-UI, MCP, and A2A.



AG-UI

- The **Agent–User Interaction** protocol is the **general-purpose, bi-directional connection** between a user-facing application and any agentic backend.

CopilotKit & AG-UI partners invite builders, protocol authors, and open-source contributors to shape how agents and humans interact.

AG-UI is fully open source and built in active collaboration with the broader protocol community.

→ Want to start building agentic applications?

Check out ag-ui.com

More Resources



AG-UI

- **Repo:** github.com
- **Overview:** docs.ag-ui.com



MCP

- **Repo:** github.com
- **Site:** modelcontextprotocol.io
- **Overview:** modelcontextprotocol.io
- **Spec:** modelcontextprotocol.io



MCP-UI

- **Repo:** github.com
- **Site:** mcpui.dev
- **Overview:** github.com
- **Spec:** github.com



A2A

- **Repo:** github.com
- **Site:** a2a-protocol.org
- **Overview:** github.com
- **Spec:** a2a-protocol.org

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