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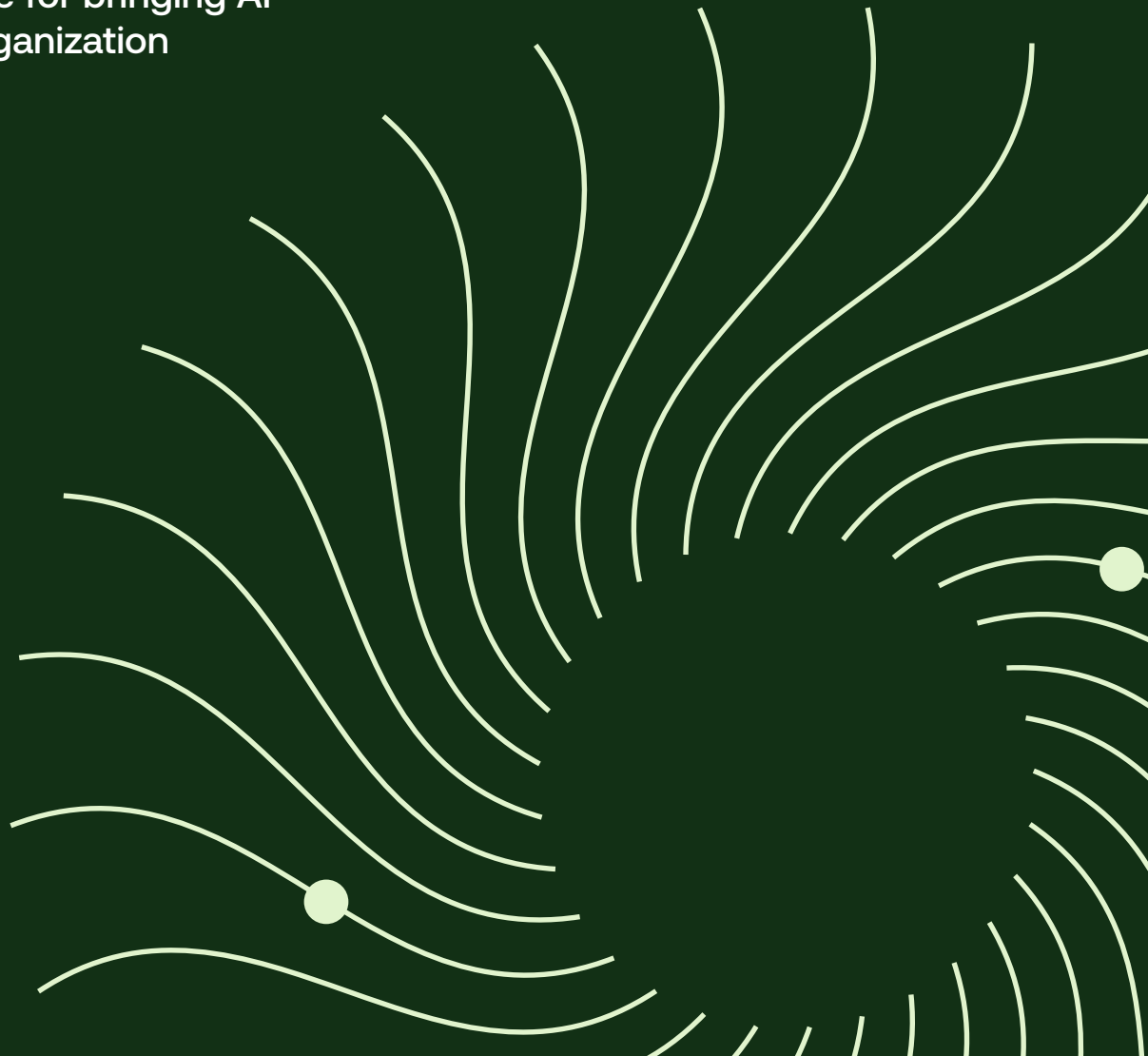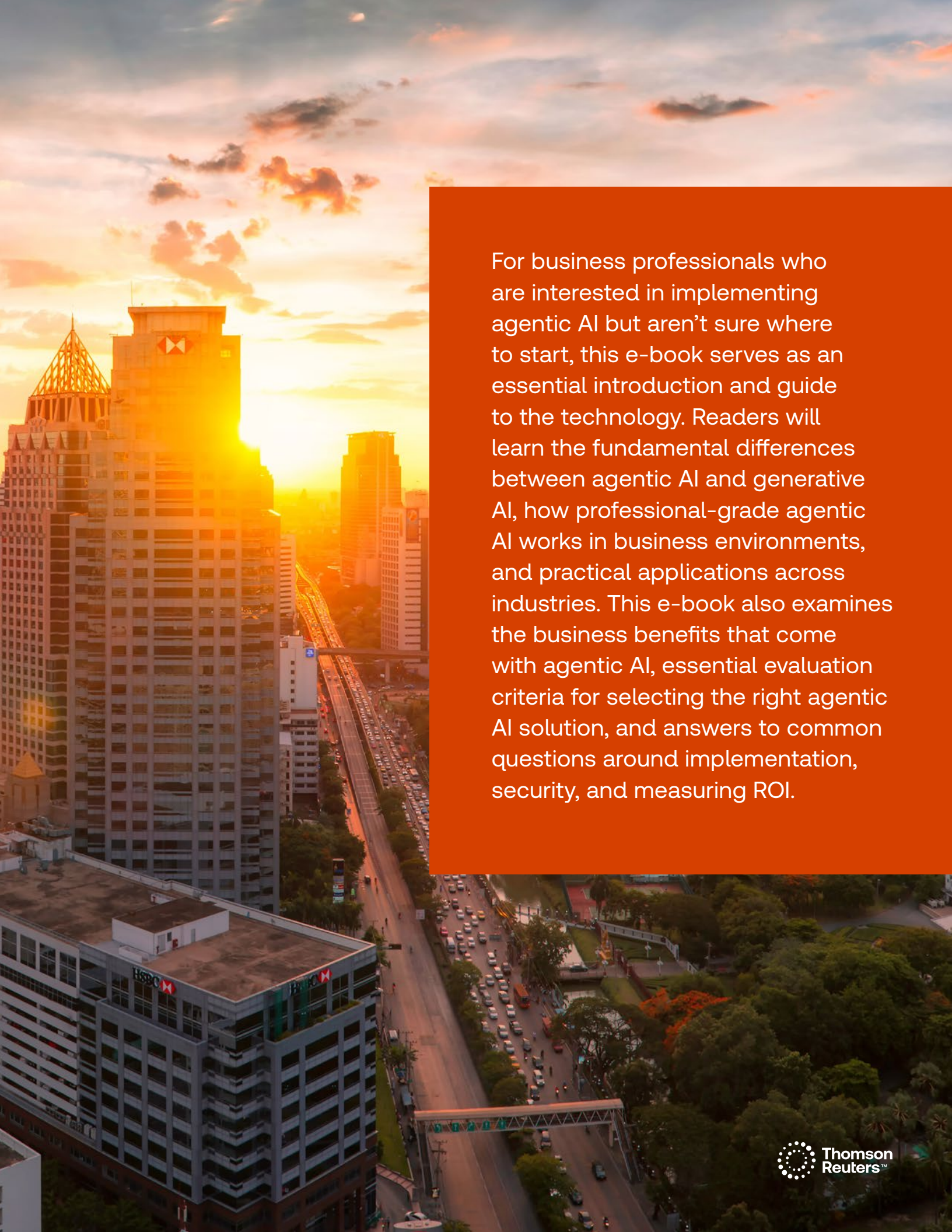
Agentic AI 101
What your business needs to know

An essential guide for bringing AI
agents to your organization

For business professionals who are interested in implementing agentic AI but aren't sure where to start, this e-book serves as an essential introduction and guide to the technology. Readers will learn the fundamental differences between agentic AI and generative AI, how professional-grade agentic AI works in business environments, and practical applications across industries. This e-book also examines the business benefits that come with agentic AI, essential evaluation criteria for selecting the right agentic AI solution, and answers to common questions around implementation, security, and measuring ROI.

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Generative AI and agentic AI: What are they, and how are they different?

Understand the basics

Awareness and use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in the enterprise has grown more rapidly than any previous technology. Though ChatGPT entered the market only a few years ago, 80% of businesses plan to implement GenAI by 2026.* But just as organizations are beginning to use GenAI, agentic AI is now also demanding their consideration. Is one better than the other? Do businesses need both? How can they be used effectively for real-world work? Answering those questions requires an understanding of what each technology offers.

What is agentic AI?

Agentic AI makes decisions and takes action—it performs. GenAI reacts to specific input so it can generate output—it creates. GenAI can produce text, images, code, and other items in response to your step-by-step questions and commands. Agentic AI systems are more autonomous and can carry out multi-step assignments after only a single input. Agentic AI uses machine learning (ML) and other AI-powered technologies like large language models (LLMs) to drive adaptability and decision-making capabilities. Agentic AI leverages ML to enable autonomous decision-making, action execution, and adaptation to dynamic environments. In a consulting firm that wants to optimize and streamline both complex tasks and repetitive tasks, for instance, GenAI could draft a client proposal based on a standard template and recent case studies. Agentic AI could then submit the proposal through the firm's CRM, schedule a follow-up meeting, and adjust the project pipeline to reflect the new opportunity.

GenAI vs. Agentic AI

GenAI requires assistance to create—you must describe the requirements, provide details, and ask for fine-tuning changes to get the best results. Agentic AI operates and reasons independently once you get it started. It can, for instance, interact with other tools to get something done, such as sending an email directly from your account or triggering an action in your company software. The ideal AI solution would use multiple technologies, with agentic AI employing GenAI, for example. It's important to remember, though, that AI isn't perfect—both GenAI and agentic AI require human oversight, which includes reviewing generated materials and double-checking that tasks were completed correctly.

What is a query?

A query, also known as a prompt, is what you give a GenAI or an agentic AI tool to get what you need. At its most basic, a query is a question ("How many breeds of dogs are there in the world?") or a command ("Tell me how many dog breeds there are in the world."). Because these AI models use natural language processing (NLP), you can pose a question in a human-like way (versus learning special commands or codes). The best GenAI results require additional context— examples of work, detailed directions, and guidelines such as word count limits or intended audience.

In this e-book, we'll explain the benefits of agentic AI in a business context and what to look for when selecting an agentic AI solution, as well as answer common questions businesses have when considering adding agentic AI.

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How agentic AI works

Explore the applications of professional-grade agentic AI

Across industries and roles, most everyone spends time on rote tasks that take them away from the work they enjoy most, stifling engagement and, over time, innovation and growth. A business, for example, might find its staff devoting more resources to bookkeeping than to the creative marketing and promotion that drive revenue.

Professional-grade AI agents leverage algorithms that are trained on content relevant to your work so they can self-evaluate, learn, and question. This means they can be customized to serve specialized verticals, such as legal or accounting. Pre-trained agentic AI understands industry-specific workflows, so it can offer tailored help. As agentic AI "gets to know" your business, it adapts and becomes more efficient. The result is a solution that goes beyond simply automating tasks to dynamically performing them sequentially in complex situations. For example, at a law firm, an agentic AI assistant might start by helping with simple case research. Over time, it could learn that certain types of cases tend to require specific precedents or filings. It can then begin preparing draft documents or suggesting strategy briefs ahead of schedule, without needing instruction to do so.

Agentic AI can reduce mundane, routine labor, giving you more time to do higher-value, human-centered work—which AI can't do. Think of it as a productivity-boosting assistant, not a replacement. Once a business decides what its goals and needs are, it can use an agentic AI solution to draft a roadmap to those goals, break the path into subtasks, and evaluate progress. Autonomous agents can't have essential face-to-face conversations with your customers, but it can fulfill client requests on the backend. And human intervention and oversight—such as review of GenAI-produced documents—remains essential in every case.

How businesses are using agentic AI

Businesses get the most value from using agentic AI as a complement to GenAI, but for agentic AI specifically, there is a wide variety of use cases, with specialized applications for different industries. In general, businesses use agentic AI to:

Research	Draft
Analyze	Summarize
Plan	Compare
Organize	Advise

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For example, AI agents in law practices can conduct case law research faster, compare contract versions in real time, and, by working in conjunction with GenAI tools, auto-draft deposition outlines. Some additional examples of how to meet specific goals across industries and departments include:

Human resource departments

Screen large volumes of resumes, schedule interviews, and rank candidates.

Media companies

Coordinate approvals across creative teams, segment audiences for personalized content delivery, and gauge social media trends.

Financial firms

Generate personalized reports, adapt investments based on risk level, and track portfolio performance.

Risk management

Analyze internal transactions and external market data to detect potential threats early.

Remember: Agents are not the same as bots. Bots are not typically considered autonomous systems because they operate within the confines of a script, have limited logic, and can only handle simple tasks (such as pulling answers to a question from a company knowledge base). An agent is more intelligent, goal-driven, and uses extensive logic to undertake more complicated jobs.

Agentic AI 101: What your business needs to know

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The benefits of agentic AI

Discover the proven advantages of folding agentic AI into your business

Even if used only on a small scale, agentic AI can improve efficiency, accommodate more business, and elevate work quality. As industries swiftly embrace professional-grade agentic AI, doing the same will help you maintain a competitive edge that comes with distinct advantages.

☑ **Shift your focus to creative and strategic work.**

Complete tedious, time-consuming, multi-step tasks faster so you can focus on the complex, strategic, and interpersonal work machines can't do. You'll be able to devote more resources to valuable and enjoyable endeavors that better serve your customers and your business.

☑ **Increase productivity by completing tasks and attaining insights and information quickly.**

Agentic AI integrates actions such as research, analysis, and drafting in one seamless workstream. You can use agentic, guided workflows that suggest and execute the best steps for a given project at your request—in a fraction of the time a human could do it.

☑ **Improve the quality of work.**

Agentic AI can sift through and analyze large amounts of data in a short time, leading to in-depth analysis and highly informed suggestions. It also eliminates common human errors, such as typos or incorrect numeric input. While agentic AI helps businesses produce higher-quality work products and services that will win more business, it can't replace the expertise of professionals, which includes the ethical judgment, creativity, curiosity, and nuanced understanding humans excel at.

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What to consider when selecting an agentic AI solution

Know how to distinguish good AI solutions from the rest

Like any platform or tool, some agentic AI solutions are better than others. Not every "agentic AI" is truly agentic, and not all offer the accuracy and security guardrails required for professional use. Below are essential characteristics and AI capabilities to look for when assessing agentic AI solutions to use for your work.

Seek	Avoid
Reliable content: Integration with respected, industry-specific information repositories and sources to get results you can trust. **Ask:** Does this agent gather information from a provider I feel confident about?	⚠ Connections to sources that are not thoroughly maintained and verified. **Risk:** Referencing inaccurate, incomplete, or false information from unreliable sources that detracts from reliability.
Benchmarked capabilities: Intuitive, intelligent search features that have been tested against industry-relevant benchmarks. **Ask:** What volume of documents can this agent process at one time? Have there been user studies that reflect the agent's ability to pick up on important themes?	⚠ Research capabilities that have not been evaluated in a study. Limited research capabilities and incomplete analysis. **Risk:** Time-consuming verification and data searches. Inability to sense nuance in complex material and lack of effective problem-solving.
Secure system: A clearly stated, accessible, and robust security and privacy policy that meets industry standards. **Ask:** Does this agent encrypt data in transit? Does this agent conduct tasks in a way that is compliant with my industry's regulations (e.g., HIPAA, GDPR, SOC 2 types)?	⚠ Vague or hard-to-find details about privacy and security. **Risk:** Exposing sensitive data. Using your data to train models used by others.
Ecosystem integration: Integration with the third-party tools crucial to your work. **Ask:** Can the agent connect to the things I use every day (e.g., Microsoft 365, company wiki, or Salesforce)?	⚠ Costly, time-intensive customizations and manual integrations with the tools you use every day. **Risk:** Limited scalability and finite ways to grow agentic AI use with your business. Inability to use the agent long-term.
All-in-one experience: Comprehensive functionality and suite of tools that offer a unified experience. **Ask:** Can I use it across my entire workflow, or just for certain phases of a project?	⚠ Functionality that addresses some, but not all, of your critical workflows. **Risk:** Switching constantly among tools, creating extra steps, and not fulfilling learning potential because of siloed, patchwork-like processes.

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Agentic AI FAQ

Is it too early for my business to start using agentic AI?

No, and in fact, many organizations of all sizes are already using AI agents and have proven their benefits. To maintain your competitive edge, you need access to all that agentic AI offers, today. Businesses that haven't embraced agentic AI will have a difficult time competing with those that have—and starting sooner offers advantages. Every bit of time saved, paired with improved results, makes today's adopters much more competitive and gives them a much bigger opportunity to discover new uses for agentic AI, continuing a cycle of improved performance.

How do I start integrating AI agents into my workday?

Different people hold different levels of technological competency. If you're less familiar with agentic AI, start small—ask the agent to complete a low-stakes task conducive to automation, such as scheduling emails or formatting documents. Organizations can also consider designating more technologically advanced employees as power users who can quickly identify valuable ways the agents can improve business operations. Collaborate with a technology provider that offers the right blend of content, expertise, and solutions to help you integrate AI agents into your workflows. Some vendors offer live training or recorded tutorials to assist customers with organizational adoption.

What should I look for in a privacy and security policy?

Security is a critical aspect, especially in fields handling sensitive information. Look for a provider that follows a comprehensive information security management framework, including clearly defined policies, standards, and best practices. Prioritizing solutions that align with federal security protocols—such as those pursuing or maintaining FedRAMP authorization—can offer added assurance in high-risk environments. Your agentic AI solution should at the very least comply with SOC 2 Types I and II standards, encrypt data in transit and at rest, have strict privacy controls, and not use the data you enter to train underlying models.

How difficult is it to integrate agentic AI into my existing technological systems? What kind of tools and software could we connect agentic AI with?

Some AI agents can embed themselves in the software and services you use every day, such as subscription news services, Microsoft products, or company knowledge bases, through simple actions such as signing in to your third-party account. A good agentic AI solution should have a straightforward integration process so your agent can move with you among multiple products and platforms.

Do I need to train the agents?

Professional-grade agentic AI shouldn't require extensive training or customization to meet your business' needs. Choose an AI agent that's been trained with comprehensive, reliable, and current datasets and content. It should also operate according to well-designed directives. The more you use the agent, the more it learns, and the more it can do for you.

How do I measure the ROI of agentic AI?

Assess how many hours designated tasks take you without your AI agent, then measure the time they take with it. Equate that time with the hourly costs associated with the tasks now offloaded to your agent, and from there you can determine how long it will take you to break even on your investment. You can also track increased revenue resulting from the ability to produce more work in less time.

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Take the first step with agentic AI

Start innovating

Adopt the work of the future with Thomson Reuters. We blend more than 225 years of industry expertise with technological innovation to provide pathways that help businesses navigate change with confidence.

Thomson Reuters CoCounsel is the professional-grade AI solution for professionals, trained by industry experts, backed by authoritative content, equipped with best-in-class security, and enhanced by our cutting-edge GenAI and agentic AI.

Learn more about CoCounsel for your business and stay up to date on all things AI by subscribing to our newsletter.

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