DENNIS GUMPRICH

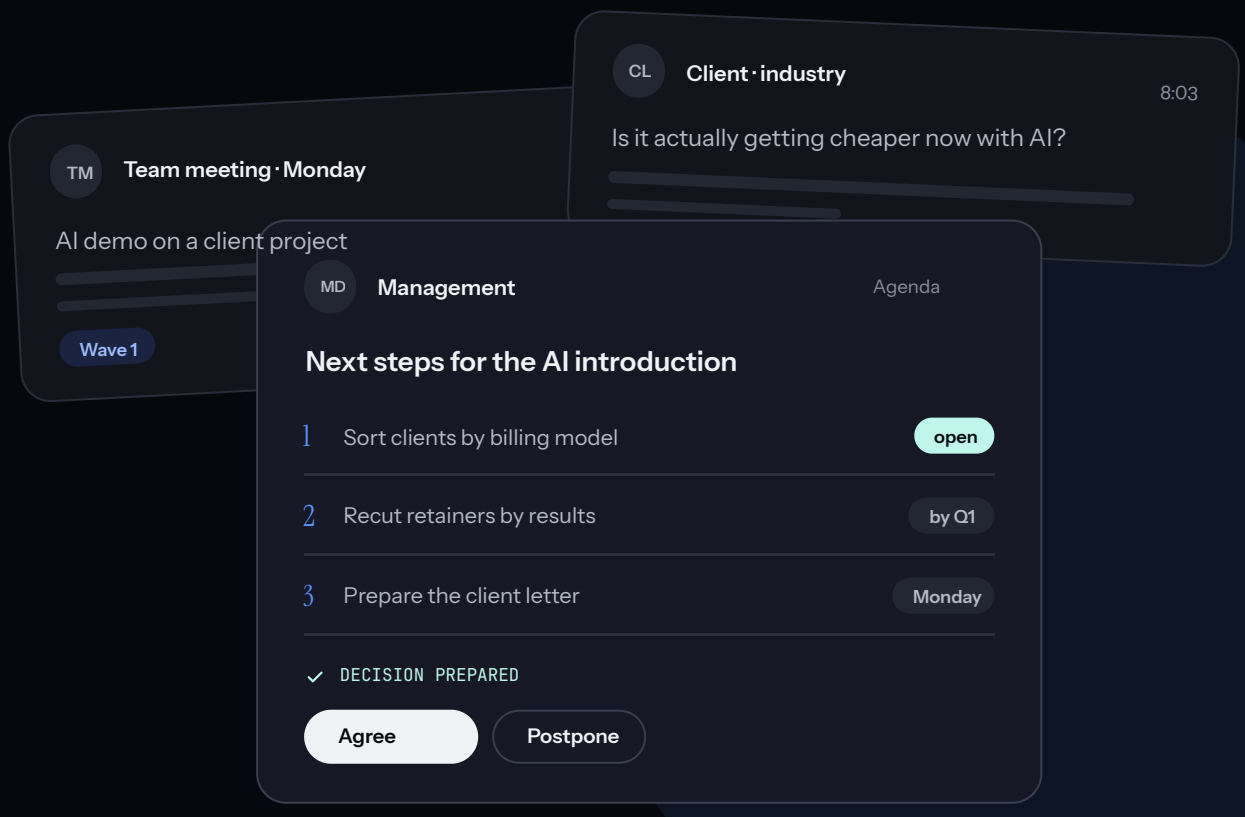
GUIDE · AS OF NOVEMBER 2026

FOR AGENCY OWNERS AND MANAGEMENT

The AI shift in the agency.

What happens to the hourly rate.

What happens to your revenue when texts are created in half the time, how you talk to clients about it and what you will sell in future. For content, PR and marketing agencies that have decided on AI and for those about to.



14 pages · with 4 templates to copy and fill in

dennis-gumprich.de

Foreword

The decision has been made. Now the work begins.

1 What happens to our hourly rate?

2 How do we talk to clients?

3 What will we sell in future?

4 How do we bring the team along?

Whether an agency should use AI is no longer a question; most clients assume it anyway. It gets harder after that. If a specialist article only takes half the time, what does that mean for offers calculated by the hour? What do you tell the client who asks whether it will be cheaper now? And what do you tell the team whose utilization suddenly drops?

These questions land with owners and management. They cannot be delegated because they decide the margin for the coming years.

This guide puts them in order and shows which decisions you should make before, during and after the introduction. It comes with four templates. You can fill in tables and the checklist directly in the PDF. All examples and figures are entirely fictitious. Where legal matters are concerned, we name the regulation; this does not replace
This does not replace legal advice. There is a separate version for marketing and communications teams in companies.

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Chapter 01

Not a tool project. A transformation.

The tool is set up in a few days. It takes longer for new habits to settle in and for it to be clear what your clients will pay for in future.

Why AI is different from new software

A new project management tool changes how you organize work. AI changes the work itself because it researches, structures and writes drafts, i.e. exactly what you have been selling in hours. This shifts who does what, how long it takes and what it may cost.

Why introductions fail

Rarely because of the technology. Usually the team lacks time to try things out because utilization is high, or the drafts do not sound like the client because their brand voice is stored nowhere. And sometimes the billing model holds things back: whoever bills by the hour has little reason to become faster.

Why the most important things get left behind

The transition takes place on four levels, but only the top one has a deadline. Processes, habits and the pricing model are in no project plan. Between client meetings and deadlines, they get left behind, even though they decide the margin for the coming years.

What follows from this

Alongside the technical plan, a second one is needed. It states who explains the change to the team, who adjusts prices and contracts and who checks after four weeks whether the work has become easier and the margin better.

FIG. 1 **Four levels of the transition and who is responsible for them**

Level	What changes	Responsible	Duration
Technology	Set up tools, access per client, connect systems	**IT or agency management**	Days
	Below lies the actual transition		
Processes	Briefing, review, client approval, data foundation per client	**Team leads**	Weeks
Habits	Editing drafts instead of writing yourself, learning to trust suggestions	**The whole team**	Months
Pricing model and offering	Billing, retainers, service portfolio, contracts	**Management**	Quarters

Own illustration. Duration as a rough estimate.

Rule of thumb — The tool is ready in days. The pricing model takes quarters.

Chapter 02

What happens to the hourly rate?

“If we are twice as fast, will we only earn half as much?”

Typical question in agency management, shortly before the introduction

Where hours become a trap

If you bill by effort, your fee falls with every hour AI saves. The same applies to retainers sold as hourly quotas: at the next renewal at the latest, the client asks why they should pay the same for fewer hours.

Where AI raises the margin

With fixed prices per service and packages with fixed results, the fee stays the same while the effort falls. The return per hour rises. That is exactly where it pays to become faster.

The value remains

Clients pay for results and responsibility: a text that works, a campaign that is ready on time, and someone who answers for facts and brand voice. AI changes nothing about that. It only changes how much time it costs.

The utilization trap

Many agencies measure employees by billable hours. Whoever works faster with AI suddenly looks worse. Whoever does not adjust this punishes exactly the people who use the tool well and wonders why nobody uses it.

FIG. 2 **The same job in half the time, depending on billing**

Billing	Fee for the job	Team effort	Return per hr
Fixed price per service calculated on value	100%	50%	×2
Package with fixed results Retainer without reference to hours	100%	50%	×2
Retainer with hourly quota until the next renewal	100%	50%	×2, then open
Billing by effort Hourly rate	50%	50%	×1

before · Fee with AI · Effort with AI

Own illustration. Simplified calculation example in which only the effort is halved.

Rule of thumb

It is not AI that cuts your revenue, but a pricing model that pays for hours instead of results.

Chapter 02 · continued

Three levers for the pricing model.

No client has to be switched overnight. But it pays to sort all clients by billing type once and decide deliberately for each group.

1 · Calculate fixed prices on value

In future, calculate fixed prices per format based on the value of the service and your responsibility, not on the new effort. A specialist article that brings inquiries is not worth less because it is created faster.

2 · Recut retainers by results

Instead of an hourly quota, agree on fixed results, for example a number of specialist articles and posts and a monthly report. This protects your margin and gives the client predictability.

3 · Invest the time in new services

The third lever is not a pricing question. Hours gained become services that clients like to pay for, such as topic strategy, evaluation or building a data foundation for their brand. More on this in chapter 03.

Make performance visible

Internally, record not only hours but also results per client: pieces delivered, deadlines met, correction loops. That is the basis for every calculation and for the conversation at renewal.

Template · price check per client · fillable on screen

Client or service	Billing	Hrs per year today	Hrs per year with AI	Fee per year	Return per hr today → with AI	Lever
Industrial client, specialist article	Fixed price	120	70	€12,000	100 → €171	1
Mid-sized company, social media	Hours	200	120	18,000 → €10,800	90 → €90	2

Return per hour = fee ÷ hours. When billing by effort, the fee falls with the hours and the return per hour stays the same. Grey rows are an entirely fictitious calculation example. The lever column refers to the three levers above.

Chapter 03

What you will sell in future.

When texts are created faster, pure production becomes an interchangeable service. What remains and becomes more valuable is everything clients really need you for.

What becomes interchangeable

Today, every client can get a decent first draft themselves. Whoever only delivers texts according to a briefing competes with the client's own tool, and that is faster and cheaper.

What becomes more valuable

Strategy and topic planning, knowledge of brand and audience, quality assurance with facts and approvals, responsibility for the result and measuring impact. The client cannot simply switch all this on themselves. Read how the agency business is shifting in AI agency 2027.

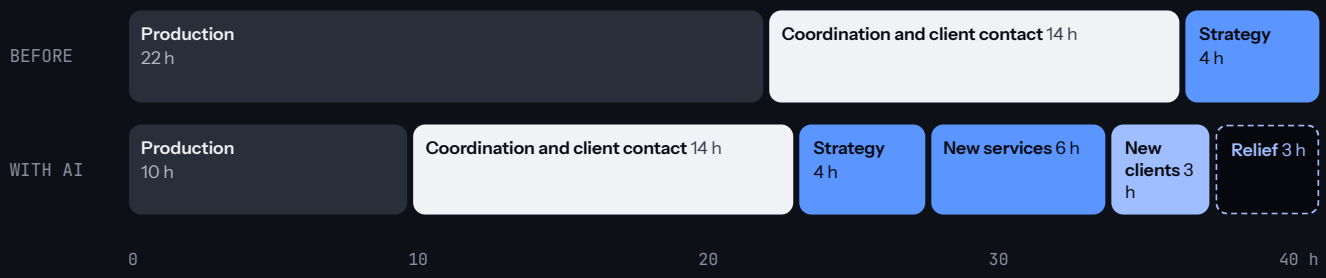
New services

Many agencies know exactly what they would offer if there were time: building a data foundation with brand voice and rules for the client, setting up and managing AI agents for them, preparing content for visibility in AI answers or a monthly impact report. With AI, this list becomes an offering.

Growth without new hires

Many agencies can hardly find skilled workers. With AI, they can still take on new clients without overloading the team. That is a different message from job cuts and should be phrased that way.

FIG. 3 **A 40-hour working week, before and with AI**



Of the **12 hours less production**, 6 go into new services and 3 into new clients; 3 remain with the team as relief. Production here means research, drafts and variants per channel.

Own illustration. Example split, not a measurement.

Rule of thumb

Stop selling texts; sell reliable results. The texts are included.

Chapter 04

Talking to clients. Without discounts.

Sooner or later, a client asks whether you are now doing this with AI and whether it will then be cheaper. Whoever is prepared for this turns the question into a good conversation.

Openness pays off

Clients notice anyway, at the latest when deliveries arrive faster. Whoever tells them first ensures that it is seen as a sign of a modern agency and not as a savings program at the expense of quality.

Turn the advantage into an offer

Instead of talking about prices, a concrete offer pays off: faster responses to occasions, an additional channel or a quarterly conversation about impact. That turns time gained into something the client can see.

"Will it be cheaper now?"

Clients pay for results and responsibility, not for typing. Responsibility remains entirely with you, and a person still checks every delivery. What changes is the speed and often what additionally becomes possible.

What you had better not say

"From now on, everything will be cheaper." "The AI does this now." "We need fewer people for this." All three sentences shift the conversation to price and away from your performance.

"Is the AI doing this now?"

The honest answer: the AI prepares, people decide. Research, outlines and drafts go faster. Strategy, brand knowledge, review and approval remain with your team, and that is exactly what the client cannot switch on themselves.

FIG. 4 **What the client pays for, before and with AI**

Service	Effort with AI	With whom	Value for the client
Research and drafts	falls significantly	AI prepares	stays
Brand knowledge and strategy	stays	Your team	rises
Review, facts, approval	stays	Your team	rises
Responsibility for the result	stays	Your agency	stays
Measuring impact	new in the offering	Your team	rises

Own illustration.

Rule of thumb

Clients pay for results and responsibility. Both remain with you, so the value remains too.

Chapter 04 · continued

Clarify contracts. Then write to clients.

Before you talk to clients, it is worth looking at the contracts. Four points should be clarified.

Client data

If you process your clients' documents or personal data with AI tools, you need a data processing agreement with the provider under Art. 28 GDPR. Also check whether

confidentiality agreements with clients permit external tools.

Usage rights

Under Section 2 (2) of the German Copyright Act, only personal intellectual creations, i.e.
human design, are protected by copyright. Purely machine-generated parts are therefore generally not protected, and you cannot transfer exclusive rights to them. Adjust the clauses on usage rights accordingly.

Labeling

Art. 50 of the AI Act has applied since 2 August 2026. AI-generated texts intended to inform the public on matters of public interest
must be disclosed, unless a person has reviewed them and someone bears editorial responsibility. Clarify with the client who that is. More in AI labeling.

Review and approval

Record who checks facts and who approves. Properly documented, this is also your best argument in client conversations.

Template · letter to your clients

New message to copy

Subject How we work for you with AI

Dear clients,

since [month] AI has been supporting us with [e.g. research, drafts and variants for your channels] . For you, this mainly means three things.

1. Your data remains protected. Our tools are contractually bound and process data [in the EU] . 2. A person from our team continues to check and take responsibility for every delivery. Your brand voice and your approvals
   remain the yardstick.
3. You get results faster, and we have more time for [e.g. topic planning and evaluating what works] .

We will be happy to show you in our next meeting what this looks like in

practice. Best regards
[Agency]

Rule of thumb

What is clarified in the contract does not have to be defended in the client conversation.

Chapter 05

Bringing the team along.

In agencies, two concerns are heard particularly often: “Will we still be needed?” and “What happens to my utilization?”. Both deserve an honest answer.

“Will we still be needed?”

AI takes over work steps, not the client relationship. It shifts the job profile, from writing to editing and advising. So present it as support and not as a tool with which management measures performance.

“What happens to my utilization?”

As long as billable hours are the most important goal, AI is a risk for every individual. So say early how you will assess performance in future, before the team works it out for themselves. More on this in chapter 06.

Through the dip after the start

Curiosity is followed by a few tough days. Whoever is left alone in this phase and has client meetings on the side returns to the old way of working. It helps if someone sits alongside, errors are collected and management explicitly allows the learning time, even if it is not billable.

Training is part of it

Under Art. 4 of the AI Act, you take measures to promote your team's AI literacy. Since the amendment by Regulation (EU) 2026/1744, in force since 27 July 2026, no particular level has to be guaranteed. A short, documented briefing remains good evidence.

Template · announcement to the team

New message to copy

To	Everyone in the agency
Subject	How we use AI

Dear team,

from [date] we will use AI for [e.g. research, first drafts and variants] . Here is the most important information in advance.

1. We want to make the routine smaller, not the team.
2. The AI prepares. Editing, decisions and delivery to clients remain with you. 3. Learning time is working time. In the first [four] weeks, it counts like billable time. 4. Time gained goes into [e.g. new services, new clients and less overtime] .

[Name] already uses the tool and is your contact person. On [date] we will show it in the team meeting on real client projects.

Best regards
[Management]

Rule of thumb

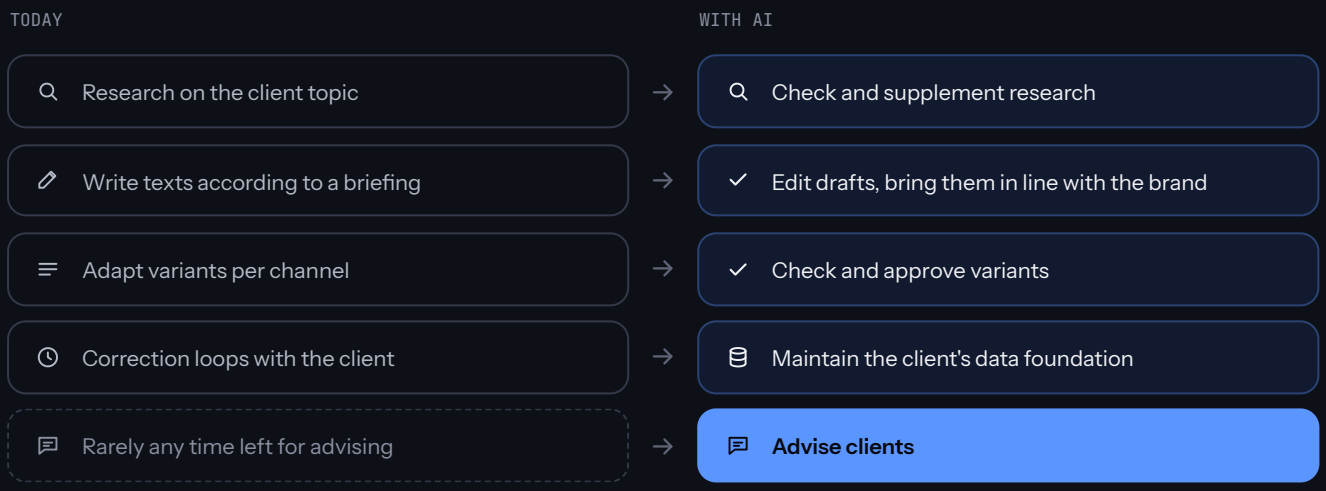
As long as only billable hours count, AI is a risk for the team. Change the measurement first.

Chapter 06

New roles in the team. From copywriting to advising.

When AI prepares, the work shifts. This changes job profiles, training and the question of how good work is measured.

FIG. 5 **How a working day in copy and editorial shifts**



Own illustration. Example from everyday agency work.

Editing is a skill in its own right

Whoever checks a draft needs different skills from someone who writes it themselves. You have to know what matters to the client, recognize errors that sound plausible and have the courage to reject a suggestion. This should be learned and recognized.

What happens to training?

Juniors have often learned their craft through simple texts. If AI takes this over, this learning stage is missing. Deliberately define what newcomers continue to write themselves, and have them edit AI drafts with justification.

One data foundation per client

Each client needs someone who maintains brand voice, audiences, no-gos and formats and aligns the AI accordingly. This role decides whether drafts sound like the client. The use case Brand voice and AI policy shows how.

Reassess performance

Instead of billable hours alone, margin per client, deadlines met, correction loops and renewals count. Otherwise the fastest
way of working remains the one that looks
worst in the assessment.

Rule of thumb

> The job profile changes, not the value of the work. Train specifically for editing and advising.

Chapter 07

In waves, not all at once.

Experience with AI and appetite for something new are unevenly distributed in every team. An introduction in waves uses this and protects your client relationships.

Wave 1 · Own content

Two or three curious people start with the agency's own content, such as the blog or LinkedIn. Mistakes cost nothing with clients there. The first wave finds the teething problems and later becomes buddies for everyone else.

Wave 2 · A pilot client

Then comes a client with whom you can speak openly, with one format and with their consent. Beforehand, you store their brand voice, audiences and no-gos, otherwise the drafts remain interchangeable.

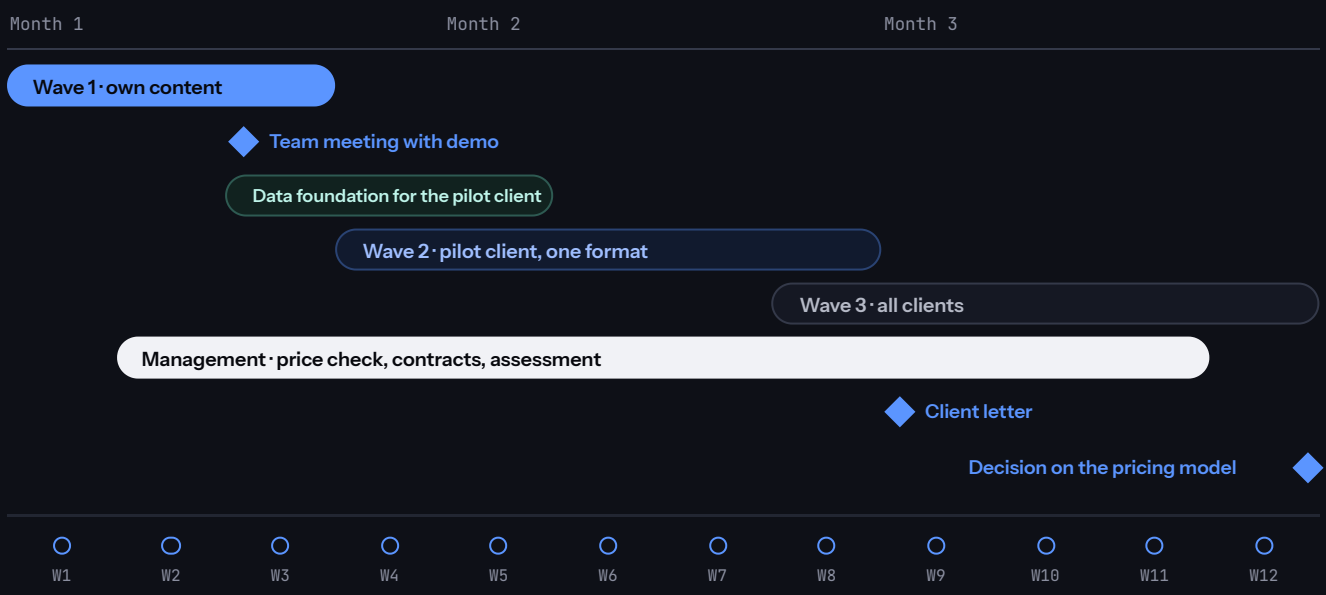
Wave 3 · All clients

Only then do you switch client by client and format by format. Beforehand, the first wave shows live in the team meeting what the work looks like now. Pilot and rollout shows why a short test is not enough.

In parallel · Prices and contracts

While the team learns, management clarifies the price check, contracts, assessment and client letter. After three months at the latest, it should be clear how you will bill in future.

FIG. 6 **Twelve weeks from the first wave to regular operation**



Circles: feedback quarter-hour, every week

Own illustration. Period varies depending on agency size.

Rule of thumb

Learn first on your own content, then with one client, then with all of them.

Chapter 08

How to tell that it is working.

After three months, nobody should have to say “I think it helps”. Five simple signs show whether the transition holds and where it does not.

FIG. 7 **Five signs that it holds**

Usage	Is everyone who is supposed to work with it doing so?	weekly
Delivery time	from briefing to delivery	monthly
Margin	Return per hour per client and service	quarterly
Client satisfaction	Correction loops, renewals	monthly
Mood	What helps, what annoys, what do we change?	weekly

Own illustration.

Usage before savings

The first question is not how much time is saved, but whether the tool is used at all, by everyone who is supposed to use it. Whoever is not working with it after four weeks has a reason. Finding it out is more valuable than any statistic.

Margin per client

With the price check from chapter 02, you have a baseline. After a quarter, it pays to compare whether the return per hour has risen, stayed the same or fallen. Where it falls, the billing model is the starting point, not the tool.

Satisfied clients

Fewer correction loops, shorter delivery times and renewals without price discussions are the best signs. Whoever regularly reports impact for clients will find a process in the use case Reporting and monitoring.

The mood in the team

The weekly quarter-hour is the best early warning system. Whoever takes the answers seriously and visibly acts on them wins over the skeptics.

Template · agenda for the quarterly meeting

Meeting · quarterly AI review to copy

1. Who uses the tool, who does not, and why?
2. Have delivery times and correction loops become shorter?
3. How has the return per hour developed for each client?
4. Which clients do we switch next, and who takes care of it?

Rule of thumb

What nobody looks at does not get better. One fixed meeting per quarter is enough.

To tick off · fillable on screen

The checklist. Everything on one page.

Twelve points for owners and management, in the order in which they come up during the transition.

DECISION

- [ ] We have defined who is responsible for the transition.
- [ ] We have defined where the time gained should go.
- [ ] The first wave starts with own content, not with clients.

TEAM

- [ ] Management announced the introduction personally.
- [ ] There are AI buddies, and learning time counts as working time.
- [ ] The briefing under Art. 4 AI Act is documented.

PRICING MODEL

- [ ] Our clients are sorted by billing type.
- [ ] Fixed prices are based on the value of the service, not on hours.
- [ ] We do not measure performance only in billable hours.

CLIENTS AND IMPACT

- [ ] Data processing and confidentiality are clarified.
- [ ] Usage rights and labeling are regulated in the contracts.
- [ ] We have an answer to “Will it be cheaper now?”.

NOTES

Rule of thumb

If all boxes are ticked, the transition holds. If one is missing, you know exactly where to start.

Continue with implementation

From guide *to client project.*

The use cases show step by step for individual tasks how to set up processes, agents and the data foundation, for yourselves and for your clients. The guides go deeper into the topics in this PDF.

USE CASES FOR CLIENT PROJECTS

- Brand voice and AI policy
  Build a data foundation per client →
- Multichannel and content recycling
  One core piece, variants for every channel →
- Product descriptions at scale
  Texts from verified data instead of research →
- All 15 use cases
  Process, agents and instructions →

GUIDES AND TOOLS

- AI agency 2027
  How the agency business is changing →
- Pilot and rollout
  Why a short trial proves nothing →
- AI policy for marketing
  Word template with data traffic light and approval path →
- AI tool approval checklist
  60 checkpoints for IT and data protection →

IN THIS PDF TO COPY AND FILL IN

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Letter to your clients Page 8

Announcement to the team Page 9

Agenda quarterly meeting Page 12

Checklist Page 13

30-MINUTE ANALYSIS · FREE OF CHARGE

Where does your content process lose time today?

In 30 minutes, we look together at processes, tools and AI use. Afterwards you know where time and margin are lost and what to tackle first.

Choose a date

About Dennis Gumprich

Dennis Gumprich writes on dennis-gumprich.de about content operations, AI quality and tool selection for marketing and communications teams and the agencies that work with them.

For in-house teams

What happens to budget, roles and time gained in your own content team is covered in the version The AI shift in the content team.