

THE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR AI VENDOR BEFORE DEPLOYING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AT YOUR ORGANIZATION

Insights
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Recent studies reflect that more than 75% of companies are either using or exploring the use of AI in their businesses, and more than 80% of employers consider AI a top priority in their future business plans. But finding the right AI vendor and AI solution isn't just about choosing a product that supports your goals – it's also about ensuring the AI system won't bring you any unanticipated legal liability and disastrous reputational harm. Asking the right questions will help you nail down whether your vendor is truly ready to deliver value to your organization while also addressing the unique risks of adopting AI technology. Below are the critical areas to evaluate, designed to help you build a smart framework for your vendor selection process. And for assistance in developing a checklist tailored to your situation, analyzing the answers you receive, or having a trusted partner guide you through the entire process, contact a member of the FP AI, Data, and Analytics Team for personalized service.

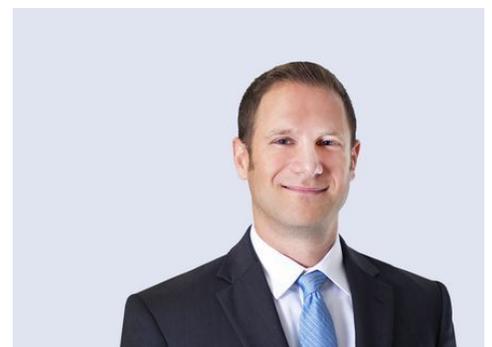
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Essential Questions to Ask Your AI Vendor Before Deploying **Artificial Intelligence** at Your Organization

- 1 MATCH: Core Capabilities and Alignment with Business Needs**
Determine whether the product is a natural fit for your company goals.
- 2 EASE: User Experience and Accessibility**
It's crucial to ensure the technology serves all of your employees, not just your most tech-savvy experts.
- 3 LAUNCH: Technical Deployment and Integration**
Ask about deployment so you can gauge the level of effort needed from your IT team and set realistic expectations.
- 4 PEOPLE: Internal Skills and Personnel Requirements**
Evaluate your internal team's capabilities to ensure it can effectively manage the AI solution.
- 5 DATA: Data Management and Ownership**
Whether to be provided by the vendor or leveraging your own, you need to know if data is AI-ready.
- 6 SECURE: Security, Governance, and Compliance**
Confirm that vendors have robust protocols in place for data protection, governance, and regulatory compliance.
- 7 FAIRNESS: Responsible AI and Ethical Commitments**
Remain on the right side of the law and demonstrate your commitment to doing the right thing.
- 8 GUIDANCE: Customer Support, Documentation, and Training**
Ensure your vendor has strong support capabilities to provide the resources your team needs to maximize value.
- 9 VALUE: ROI and Cost Transparency**
Get a realistic picture of the financial impact on your business to justify your purchase.
- 10 STABILITY: Flexibility and Ability to Pivot Across Models**
Ask about the LLM(s) powering the AI system and the vendor's ability to pivot as necessary.



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1. MATCH: Core Capabilities and Alignment with Business Needs

The first step in evaluating an AI vendor is determining whether its product is a natural fit for your company goals. Not all AI systems are created equal – some are optimized for specific tasks or industries, while others offer generalizable capabilities that adapt to unique workflows.

Key Questions to Ask:

- *What is the specific business problem you are trying to solve and how does your AI solution address it?* This helps confirm that you have a clearly defined use case in mind, and you can evaluate whether the specific AI solution solves that problem. AI is not always the right choice. Also, this helps show if the vendor has a proven record in your area.
- *Can your AI system be trained on our proprietary data?* AI that learns from your specific data may provide greater context and effectiveness – and minimizes the risk of bias from compromised external data from being introduced into your organization.
- *How scalable is your solution?* If your needs grow, a scalable system will ensure continued support without a costly overhaul.

These high-level questions encourage the vendor to provide an overview of their solution's capabilities, offering you an early insight into how well it will serve your team.

2. EASE: User Experience and Accessibility

No matter how powerful the AI system, it's only valuable if your team can use it effectively. Ease of use, intuitive design, and training support are crucial to ensure the technology serves all of your employees, not just your most tech-savvy experts.

Key Questions to Ask:

- *Can you show me how user-friendly your AI solution is for technical workers?* You'll want to know if everyday employees can comfortably work with the AI – so rather than just ask a leading question, ask the vendor to point out specific examples that demonstrate the ease of use.
- *Based on prior experience, what is the expected ramp-up time for users?* This helps anticipate the time needed for your team to get up to speed with the tool.

- *Do you offer a trial period, a pilot, or demo?* A trial run lets team get hands-on experience with the product, so you can evaluate its fit with your operations.

These questions are especially helpful for assessing whether the vendor is committed to a smooth user experience – a critical factor for the successful adoption of AI.

3. LAUNCH: Technical Deployment and Integration

Integrating a new AI solution with existing systems is complex, requiring a clear understanding of technical requirements and timelines. By asking questions about deployment, you can gauge the level of effort needed from your IT team and set realistic expectations for project completion.

Key Questions to Ask:

- *What hardware or software is required to deploy your solution?* This question will clarify if any additional resources are needed.
- *How compatible is your AI with our current tech stack?* Ensuring compatibility can prevent disruptions and make integration seamless.
- *How does the vendor monitor the performance of the AI application post-deployment?* AI tools, especially GenAI tools, change over time – leading to problems like algorithm and model drift that can greatly impact the performance of the AI application. Vendors must have a plan to monitor the performance of their applications post-deployment and alert you to any changes.
- *What is the projected timeline for integration?* Knowing the timeframe upfront helps align the project with other business initiatives and resources.

These deployment-focused questions offer insight into how quickly and smoothly the AI can become operational in your environment while minimizing downtime and unexpected costs.

4. PEOPLE: Internal Skills and Personnel Requirements

Even the most advanced AI systems require knowledgeable staff for successful implementation. You need to evaluate your internal team's capabilities to ensure it can effectively manage the AI solution. For complex AI deployments, vendor expertise alone may not be enough – you might need

additional training, support, or personnel.

Key Questions to Ask:

- *What internal skills are required to implement and maintain solution?* Confirm whether your existing team has the necessary expertise, or if training or hiring will be required.
- *What type of training and onboarding resources do you offer your team?* Some vendors provide substantial training and onboarding support to help bridge skill gaps.
- *Can you recommend third-party providers or partners who assist with implementation and ongoing support?* Many companies rely on third-party specialists to ensure smooth AI operation over time.

Asking about personnel requirements helps determine if your organization is fully equipped for AI adoption or if additional resources are needed to make the implementation a success.

5. DATA: Data Management and Ownership

AI Solutions are only as good as the data. Whether the primary data used by the AI solution is provided by the vendor or it will leverage your proprietary data, you need to know if your data is AI-ready or if time-consuming preparation will be required. Clarifying who owns the models, data, and AI output can avoid potential IP and privacy issues.

Key Questions to Ask:

- *Will your AI solution connect directly to our data?* This will determine if the vendor can use your data where it is today or if data preparation is required.
- *How is data stored and handled within your AI solution? Do any data leave the organization at any time (such as to a public language model like OpenAI or Claude or Gemini)?* Understanding data retention and storage policies will help you track where data is stored and where it may be vulnerable.
- *What data was used to train the AI system—both in the past and on an ongoing basis?* Did the vendor have the right to use the training data? Were the datasets used for training appropriate for the intended use of the AI system? It's critical to make sure the

vendor had the right to use the training data and selected datasets for training its system.

- *Who owns the AI model, user input, and output?* Consider the vendor should have ownership or be licensed to use your input, and the output from the AI, for other purposes. (The output could contain confidential information.) Some vendors want to use this information to improve the substance of the product beyond normal troubleshooting, so ensure you have an agreement on this point.

Confirming your data is AI-ready will help you avoid unexpected delays for time-consuming data cleanup.

6. SECURE: Security, Governance, and Compliance

Data privacy and security are non-negotiable. Since AI systems require data to function, it's essential to confirm that vendors have robust protocols in place for data protection, governance, and regulatory compliance.

Key Questions to Ask:

- *What measures are in place for data security, particularly sensitive information?* Look for encryption, anonymization, other best practices in data governance. This includes protecting any input to, and output from, the model.
- *Does the vendor have an incident response plan?* Make sure the vendor has a specific plan for dealing with any security incident and will give you immediate notice of any security incident.
- *What options are available for security settings and access permissions?* Ensuring the vendor will utilize existing user permissions can prevent unauthorized and unintended access to confidential information.
- *Does your AI system adhere to relevant regulations, like CCPA or GDPR? What are you doing to monitor new regulations and legal developments, and how quickly can you adapt to change?* Commitment to regulatory compliance safeguards against data breaches.

These high-level questions provide a snapshot of the vendor's security approach, allowing you to probe further if necessary.

7. FAIRNESS: Responsible AI and Ethical Commitments

Asking about ethics, transparency, and bias prevention shows you are serious about aligning with vendors who are committed to ethical AI practices – both in order to ensure you remain on the right side of the law but also to demonstrate your commitment to doing the right thing.

Key Questions to Ask:

- *How do you prevent bias in your AI system?* Knowing a vendor's approach to bias mitigation can help protect against unintended discriminatory outcomes. Ask if the vendor conducts any bias testing (and ask them to share the results).
- *What steps do you take to make your AI model explainable?* Explainability is key for building trust and understanding AI's decision-making process.
- *What ethical standards guide your AI's development?* A vendor's commitment to ethics indicates their dedication to fair and responsible technology.

These questions encourage transparency and highlight the vendor's commitment to building AI that aligns with ethical guidelines—necessity for today's responsible organizations.

8. GUIDANCE: Customer Support, Documentation, and Training

Strong customer support is critical to a positive AI adoption experience. It ensures that your team has a reliable partner to turn to when questions arise or issues need to be addressed. A vendor with strong support capabilities will provide the resources your team needs to maximize the AI's value.

Key Questions to Ask:

- *What type of ongoing support and access to AI experts do you offer?* Knowing if a team of experts is available will reassure your team that help is there when needed.
- *What documentation and resources do you provide?* Comprehensive, accessible resources empower your team to troubleshoot and resolve issues independently.
- *How do you collect and incorporate customer feedback?* A vendor that prioritizes a feedback loop is likely to address issues and improve the AI's functionality over time.

Asking about support options helps set expectations for what assistance your team can expect, reducing the likelihood of frustration.

9. VALUE: ROI and Cost Transparency

Your financial commitment of AI adoption might be substantial, and evaluating its return on investment is essential. Without clear insight into cost structure and potential ROI, it's hard to justify the expense. Asking about costs and expected returns can give you a realistic picture of the AI's financial impact on your business and allow you to justify your purchase to your superiors.

Key Questions to Ask:

- *What is your pricing model? Make sure there are no hidden over-usage caps or triggers, and confirm if the price structure works with your budget.*
- *Can you provide an ROI estimate for our specific use case? A tailored ROI projection can help justify the investment.*
- *Do you have case studies or testimonials that demonstrate success? Proven results from similar companies can validate the vendor's claims.*

Clear answers here will help you set realistic financial expectations and justify the investment to other stakeholders.

10. STABILITY: Flexibility and Ability to Pivot Across Models

The last thing you want is to spend the time, effort, and expense to roll out a fantastic new AI system, only to see it quickly become outdated – or worse, extinct. Make sure to ask about the large language model(s) powering the AI system, and the vendor's ability to pivot as necessary.

Key Questions to Ask:

- *What LLM (Large Language Model) or LLMs are powering the system? Make sure the LLM or LLMs being used are from reputable companies.*
- *What backup plans does the vendor have if that LLM (or LLM company) goes down? Many of the major LLMs have recent*

significant outages. Make sure the vendor can seamlessly switch to another LLM without any interruptions in service.

- *How quickly will you take advantage of updates in the LLM?* LLM models are constantly updating. Make sure you know how quickly those updates will be incorporated into the AI system.
- *Does the vendor have a decommissioning plan?* AI systems don't last forever, and you will stop using it at some point. Have a plan for what happens to your data and tech stack when you stop using the AI system.

Confirming the stability of the AI solution up-front will help avoid frustration and disappointment in the future.

Conclusion

Choosing an AI vendor is about more than just finding a tool – it's about finding a partner who will work with your team to achieve your business goals securely, ethically, and effectively. The questions outlined here are designed to help you get started on your selection journey, but they're only the beginning.

For a deeper dive tailored to your unique business needs, consulting with your FP AI attorney can make all the difference in navigating the complexities of AI adoption. For assistance in developing a checklist tailored to your situation, analyzing the answers you receive, or having a trusted partner guide you through the entire process, contact a member of the FP AI, Data, and Analytics Team for personalized service.

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