

Prompt, skill, or agent?

Know what you're buying before you pay.

A business owner paid \$2,000 for a prompt: one paragraph he could have typed himself in ten minutes. When someone sells you "AI", they are selling one of three things. They take wildly different amounts of time to build, and they should be priced accordingly.

The three things people buy

1. The prompt · minutes

You telling the model what you want right now. Type it, review what comes back, fix it, move on. A follow-up email after a sales call is one prompt. Nobody should pay project money for this.

2. The skill · an afternoon

A prompt you stopped retyping. Your process, written down once, with context, so the task runs the same way every time. The build is fast. The real cost is pulling your process out of your head and writing it down clearly. Document your process and you barely need anyone.

3. The agent · weeks

It goes and does work: reads the form submission, qualifies the lead, updates the CRM, drafts the email, schedules the follow-up, flags you when something looks off. A demo takes days. A reliable agent takes weeks, because every "what happens when this part fails?" must be answered, built, and tested.

The three-question test

1. **Does the work touch more than one tool?** Form, CRM, email, calendar. Count them.
2. **Does it happen more than once a week?** Rare tasks rarely justify automation.
3. **Does it need to run when you are not there?** Nights, weekends, while you're on a call.

Three yeses: an agent is probably right. **One or two:** a skill usually does the job. **None:** it's a prompt. Type it yourself.

Ask these before you sign anything

1. **What does the system actually do?** A prompt I could type myself, a reusable skill, or actions across several tools with nobody guiding each step?
2. **How are failures handled?** Half-empty form? CRM offline? Who gets notified when it breaks?
3. **What exactly do I own when we're done?** The prompts, the documentation, the accounts?
4. **How long will the build take, and why?** Minutes, an afternoon, or weeks. The answer should match the tier.
5. **What do you need from me in writing before you start?** If the answer is "nothing", they are not building around your process.

The answers tell you far more about the price than the words "AI powered" ever will.

Not sure which one your task needs? Paste it into the free checker at giovannielabs.ai/psa and get the verdict. Then take the free 2-minute AI Audit at diagnostic.giovannielabs.ai to see where AI would actually make you money.

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