



Scott Tischler

FOUNDER & CHAIRMAN · AIRECOMMEND.AI

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When AI Agents Start Booking and Buying: Preparing Your Business for Agentic Commerce

By Scott Tischler · July 28, 2026 · 9 min read

The next competitive frontier is not whether AI recommends you. It is whether an AI agent can complete a purchase with you without a human in the loop. That shift — from recommendation to transaction — changes what your business has to expose to the machine, and most companies are not ready for it.

I build systems that get companies chosen by AI, and I can tell you the ground is moving. For two years the game has been **Answer Engine Optimization**: getting cited when a person asks an assistant for a recommendation. The emerging game is **agentic commerce**: an agent doesn't just name you, it books the room, buys the part, or reserves the table on the user's behalf. When that happens, the deciding factor is no longer just what the model believes about you. It is whether you are **operationally selectable** — whether an agent can read your prices, check your availability, understand your policies, and complete the transaction cleanly. This article is about building that.

From recommending to transacting: what actually changes

For most of the AI-search era, the assistant handed the buyer back to you. It said "consider these three vendors," and a human clicked through, filled the form, and paid. The agent was a librarian.

Agentic commerce makes the agent a **buyer's proxy**. Given a goal — "book me a pet-friendly hotel near the venue under \$250, free cancellation" — the agent narrows options, compares them on the stated constraints, and increasingly executes the booking end to end. The human approves the goal and the outcome, not each step.

That collapses two things that used to be separate: **being discovered** and **being transacted with**. In the old funnel, a beautiful website could rescue a weak data feed, because a motivated human would work around friction. An agent will not. If your availability isn't queryable, your price isn't machine-readable, or your cancellation terms are buried in a PDF, the agent does the rational thing: it picks the competitor it **can** complete a clean transaction with.

	Recommendation era	Agentic commerce era
Agent's role	Suggests options to a human	Compares and transacts for the human
What decides	What the model believes about you	Whether you're operationally selectable
Human involvement	Clicks, compares, pays	Approves the goal and the result
Friction tolerance	High — humans work around it	Near zero — agents route around it
Winning asset	Persuasive content	Structured data, live APIs, clear terms

What makes a business selectable by an agent

An agent selecting a vendor is running a checklist, whether it is explicit or emergent from the model's reasoning. It needs to answer, quickly and confidently: ***What exactly is offered? Is it available right now? What does it cost, all-in? Can I trust this vendor? What happens if the plan changes? Can I actually complete the transaction here?*** Every "I can't tell" is a reason to move on.

So being selectable comes down to reducing the agent's uncertainty at every one of those questions. The businesses that win agentic commerce are the ones that make the machine's job trivial. Below are the six things that matter most, in the order I would fix them.

1. Structured, machine-readable data about what you offer

Agents don't read your homepage the way a customer does. They lean on structured data — **Schema.org markup** (Product, Offer, Service, LocalBusiness, Event, and related types), clean metadata, and consistent product feeds. This is the layer that tells a machine, unambiguously, ***what this is, what it costs, and what state it's in.***

Practical priorities:

- **Mark up every sellable thing** with the appropriate schema type, including price, currency, availability status, and specifications.
- **Keep it consistent with what's on the page.** Contradictions between your markup, your feed, and your visible content are a trust penalty — the agent can't tell which number is real.
- **Expose attributes agents filter on:** size, location, dates, capacity, dietary or accessibility options, warranty, whatever the real buying constraints are in your category.

Structured data is the single highest-leverage thing most businesses can do this quarter, because it is the substrate everything else rides on.

2. Live availability and inventory an agent can query

A recommendation can be stale. A transaction cannot. If an agent is going to book or buy, it needs to know the answer to "is this actually available?" at the moment of decision — not from a cached page, but from something close to real time.

That means **APIs or feeds that expose current availability, inventory, and slots**. A hotel needs queryable room availability by date. A restaurant needs live table availability. A retailer needs accurate stock. A services business needs an open-calendar or booking endpoint. The direction of travel is clear: businesses that expose a reliable, machine-consumable availability signal will be transacted with, and those that hide availability behind a "call us" or an unindexed booking widget will be skipped.

You do not necessarily have to build this from scratch. Much of it flows through the platforms you already use — your booking engine, your e-commerce backend, your reservations system, your marketplace listings. The task is making sure those signals are exposed and accurate, not locked in a silo.

3. Clear, complete, all-in pricing

Ambiguous pricing is where a huge number of businesses will lose agentic transactions, and they won't even know it. An agent comparing options on "under \$250" needs to know the **real** number — including fees, taxes where determinable, and add-ons — not a teaser rate that balloons at checkout.

- **State the price the buyer actually pays**, and make the components legible: base price, mandatory fees, taxes, options.
- **Avoid pricing that only resolves after a human enters personal data**. If the true cost is unknowable until a form is filled, the agent can't reliably compare you, so it discounts you.
- **Keep price parity honest across channels**. Agents cross-reference, and contradictory prices read as unreliability.

The blunt version: **an agent will prefer a slightly more expensive option with a knowable total over a cheaper option with an unknowable one**. Certainty is a feature you can sell.

4. Trust signals a machine can weigh

Agents are being built to be cautious with a user's money and time. Before transacting, they look for corroboration that you are legitimate and that the experience will match the promise. Many of the same **entity and reputation signals** that drive AI recommendations carry over here, now with money attached.

What moves the needle: a consistent, verifiable business identity across the web; genuine reviews and ratings on credible platforms; secure, standard checkout and payment; recognizable trust marks and certifications relevant to your category; and a track record the model can find corroborated in third-

party sources. **Independent corroboration is the strongest trust signal there is** — what others verifiably say about you outweighs what you say about yourself.

5. Machine-readable policies

Here is the one almost everyone forgets. When an agent transacts on someone's behalf, it has to reason about **what happens if things change** — cancellations, refunds, returns, changes, warranties, delivery windows. If those terms live only in dense legal prose or a downloadable PDF, the agent either guesses (a risk it will often decline) or picks a vendor whose terms it can actually parse.

Make your policies explicit and structured:

- **Cancellation and refund terms** stated in clear, consistent language — ideally reflected in your structured data (for example, an offer's return or cancellation policy fields), not just legalese.
- **Delivery, fulfillment, and service windows** stated as concrete commitments.
- **Eligibility and restrictions** — who can buy, minimums, regional limits — surfaced, not hidden.

An agent that can cleanly read "free cancellation up to 24 hours" will confidently choose you over a vendor whose cancellation terms it cannot determine. Clarity is a conversion lever in agentic commerce, not fine print.

6. A transactable path

Finally, there has to be a way to actually complete the transaction that an agent can traverse — an open, standards-based booking or purchase flow, or presence on the emerging **agentic commerce protocols and platforms** that payment and AI providers are building to let agents pay securely. This space is consolidating quickly. You don't have to bet on a single winner, but you do need to be reachable through the rails your buyers' agents will use, rather than trapping every transaction behind a bespoke flow only a human can navigate.

How to prepare now, without over-betting

You do not need to predict the exact protocol that wins to prepare intelligently. Almost everything above is valuable **today** for human buyers and AI recommendations, and it compounds as agents mature. That is the beauty of it — this is low-regret work.

A pragmatic sequence:

1. **Audit your machine-readability.** Pull up your key offers and ask: could a machine determine what this is, its real price, and its current availability, from data alone? Fix the gaps in structured data first.

2. **Expose availability and true pricing** through whatever systems you already run — booking engine, e-commerce feed, reservations platform.
3. **Structure your policies** so cancellation, returns, and fulfillment terms are explicit and consistent, not buried.
4. **Shore up trust signals** — consistent identity, real reviews, secure checkout, relevant certifications.
5. **Watch the rails.** Track the agentic-commerce standards your platforms adopt, and turn them on as they stabilize.

The companies that win the next phase of commerce will not be the ones with the cleverest ad. They will be the ones an agent can understand, trust, and transact with in a single clean pass. Your buyers are about to start delegating the purchase itself. The only question is whether your business is one an agent can actually say yes to.

Key takeaways

- ② AI is shifting from recommending vendors to transacting with them — booking, buying, and comparing on the buyer's behalf.
- ② Agents route around friction that humans tolerate, so being "operationally selectable" now matters as much as being believed.
- ② Structured, machine-readable data (Schema.org markup, clean feeds) is the highest-leverage foundation to fix first.
- ② Expose live availability and complete all-in pricing; agents prefer a knowable total over a cheaper but unknowable one.
- ② Make policies machine-readable — cancellation, refund, and fulfillment terms an agent can parse become a conversion lever.
- ② Most of this work also helps human buyers and AI recommendations today, making it low-regret preparation for agentic commerce.

Frequently asked questions

What is agentic commerce?

Agentic commerce is when an AI agent acts as a buyer's proxy and completes transactions on their behalf — comparing options, then booking, purchasing, or reserving — rather than just handing the buyer a list of

suggestions. The human approves the goal and the outcome instead of clicking through each step. It shifts the deciding factor from what a model believes about you to whether an agent can actually transact with you cleanly.

How is preparing for AI agents different from AEO?

Answer Engine Optimization focuses on getting cited when a person asks an assistant for a recommendation, which rewards persuasive, extractable content and strong entity signals. Agentic commerce adds an operational layer: the agent must read your live availability, all-in price, and policies and complete a transaction. You still need the trust signals AEO builds, plus structured data, queryable availability, and machine-readable terms.

What data do AI agents need to select my business?

An agent needs to determine, with confidence, what you offer, whether it's available right now, what it truly costs all-in, whether you're trustworthy, and what happens if plans change. That means Schema.org structured data on your offers, live availability or inventory it can query, complete pricing, verifiable trust signals, and machine-readable cancellation and return policies. Every question the agent can't answer is a reason it picks a competitor.

Why does structured data matter so much for agentic commerce?

Agents don't read your homepage the way a customer does; they rely on structured data like Schema.org markup to know unambiguously what something is, what it costs, and its current state. It is the substrate that availability, pricing, and policy signals ride on, so it's usually the highest-leverage fix. It also has to stay consistent with your visible content, because contradictions read as unreliability.

Will agents avoid businesses with unclear pricing?

Yes. An agent comparing options on a budget needs the real number the buyer pays, including fees and taxes where determinable, not a teaser rate that changes at checkout. If the true cost is unknowable until a human enters personal data, the agent can't reliably compare you and discounts you. It will often prefer a slightly pricier option with a knowable total over a cheaper one with an unknowable one.

What are machine-readable policies and why do they matter?

Machine-readable policies are your cancellation, refund, return, warranty, and fulfillment terms stated in clear, structured language an agent can parse — ideally reflected in structured data, not just buried in a PDF or legalese. Because an agent transacting for someone must reason about what happens if plans change, terms it can cleanly read become a reason to choose you. Terms it can't determine become a reason to skip you.

Do I need to build custom APIs to be ready for AI agents?

Not necessarily. Much of the required availability, pricing, and transaction capability already flows through platforms you likely use — your booking engine, e-commerce backend, reservations system, or marketplace listings. The task is exposing and keeping those signals accurate rather than locking them in a silo, and adopting emerging agentic-commerce standards as your platforms support them.

Is it too early to prepare for agentic commerce?

No, because nearly everything it requires — structured data, accurate availability, clear pricing, strong trust signals, explicit policies — already benefits human buyers and AI recommendations today. That makes it low-

regret work that compounds as agents mature. The prudent approach is to fix your machine-readability now and turn on new transaction rails as the standards stabilize, rather than waiting for a single protocol to win.

About the author. Scott Tischler is the Founder & Chairman of Alrecommend.ai and a practitioner-authority on AI search and Answer Engine Optimization. With 20+ years in marketing technology — including American Express, MetLife, and UBS — and executive study at Wharton, Harvard, Yale, and Oxford, he helps businesses become the ones AI recommends.