

The AI Conversation

How to tell clients where AI fits — before they wonder

Your clients know AI exists. They assume you use it somewhere. What they don't know is how, where, or whether it changes the work they pay you for — and when a client doesn't know, they fill the gap with the worst version of the story. The fix is simple. Say it first — and this page gives you the words.

Start with one honest line

You don't need a policy document or a big announcement. A sentence, in a call or an email, does it:

“Quick thing I want to be open about — we do use AI in parts of our work, and I'd rather tell you how than have you wonder. Mind if I walk you through it?”

Then cover the three things they actually want to hear

1 Where it helps

Name the real places — first drafts, research, summarising documents, catching errors. Being specific signals you have thought about it carefully, which is the whole point.

“It helps us move faster on the groundwork — research, first drafts, the heavy reading — so more of our time goes to your actual problem.”

2 Where it never goes

This is the line they most need to hear. Tell them what stays fully human — the judgment, the decisions, the final call, the advice with your name on it.

“The thinking, the judgment, and every recommendation you act on — that's me and my team. A machine never makes the call on your work.”

3 What they get because of it

Close on the upside to them. The honest promise is more of your senior attention, at the same standard, often sooner — because the routine work takes less of your day.

“What you get is more of our best thinking, at the same standard, often faster. The tool buys back the hours — you get the judgment those hours used to cost.”

When a client seems worried

Sometimes the question comes back uneasy. Three short, honest responses handle almost every version of it:

“Is my information safe?”

Tell them your rule plainly — what goes near a tool and what never does. Certainty is what reassures, not reassurance itself.

“Am I paying for work a machine did?”

Reframe it to value. They pay for the outcome and the judgment behind it. The tool changes your cost, never their standard.

“Why are you telling me this?”

The easiest one. Because you'd rather they heard it from you — and because a firm willing to have the conversation is the one worth trusting with the answer.

The one rule

Have the conversation before the client starts it for you. The firm that speaks first looks like it is thinking about the client's work more carefully than the firm down the street saying nothing at all. Silence is the only version of this that costs you trust.

The Catalyst · a weekly note on growing a firm through the relationships that carry it. Written by Shampa Bagchi. Keep this page where you'll see it before your next client call.