optable

Guide To AI-Powered Media Selling
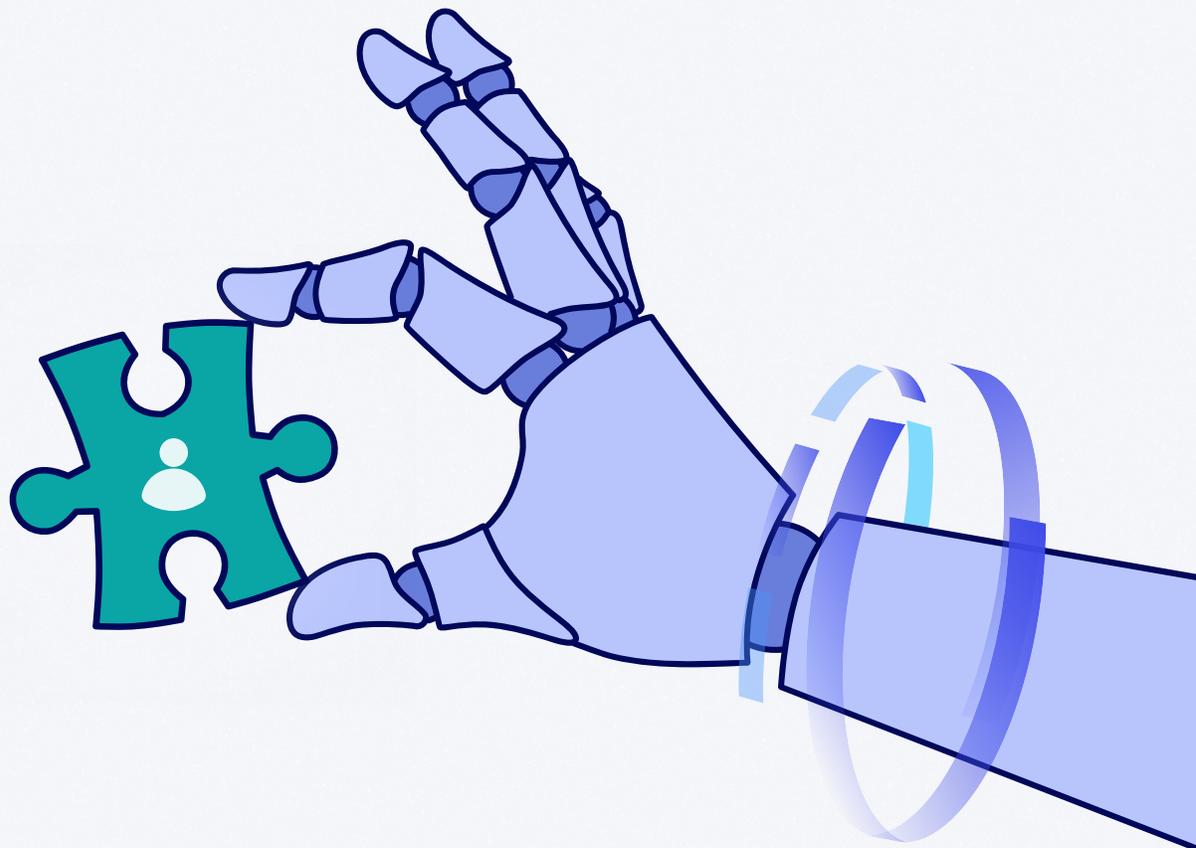
Contents

Introduction

Digital media selling is entering the most consequential transition since the rise of programmatic advertising.

Privacy regulations disrupted traditional methods of data exchange, and generative AI has devalued the exclusivity and scale offered by walled gardens. Now, we're on the threshold of a new era, in which advertisers are beginning to deploy autonomous AI agents to plan, negotiate, execute, and optimize their campaigns.

This shift creates a rare opportunity for publishers to move from reactive selling toward audience-led, outcome-driven media selling. To take advantage of an AI-powered approach, you need a foundation of unified first-party data, plus the technical infrastructure and know-how to support an agentic transformation.

> In this guide, we'll cover:
> - ✓ What agentic advertising really means
> - ✓ How the agentic shift is transforming the industry
> - ✓ A self-assessment covering five pillars of agent readiness
> - ✓ Ways to mitigate AI concerns

Publishers with mature first-party data practices, strong identity infrastructure, and established ad sales operations will find that much of the foundational work for agent-readiness is already done. Those who haven't taken these steps will need to prioritize building their foundation before seeing agentic results.

Why the agentic shift matters right now

DEFINITIONS

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI has quietly driven programmatic advertising for years, optimizing bids and predicting click-through rates.

AGENTIC AI

Sales agents represent publishers. Buyer agents represent advertisers. Agent-to-agent advertising means making deals faster, at greater scale, and more precisely than traditional programmatic workflows allow.

AGENTIC ADVERTISING

Sales agents represent publishers. Buyer agents represent advertisers. Agent-to-agent advertising means making deals faster, at greater scale, and more precisely than traditional programmatic workflows allow.
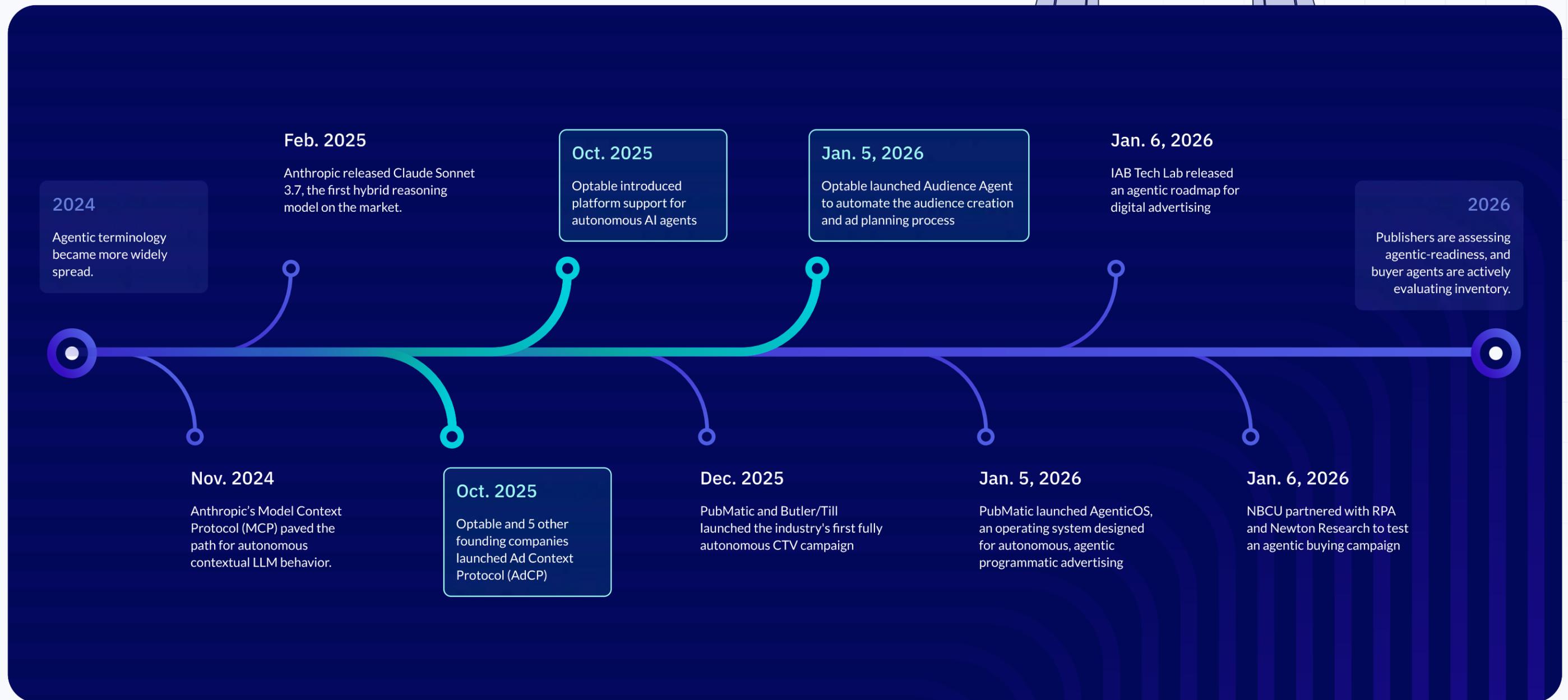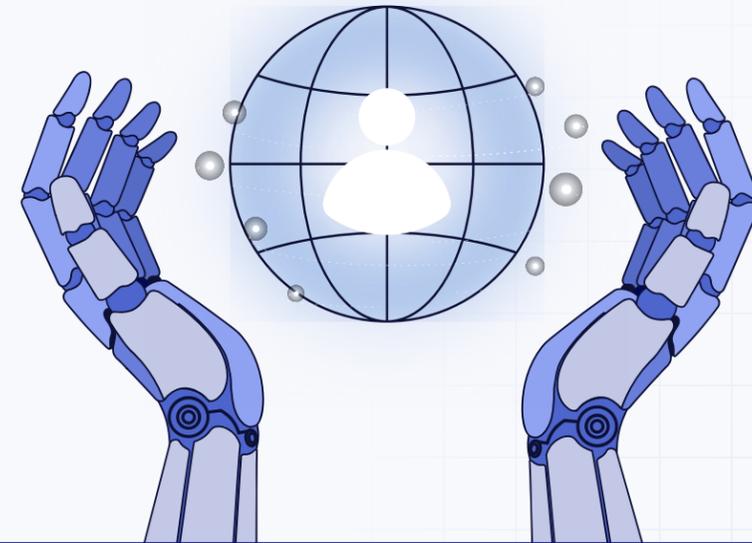
The agentic era is moving quickly. The industry went from concept to experimentation to live campaigns in record time. For publishers, the time to act on agentic AI is now. In our upcoming State of Agentic Advertising survey with Digiday, **over 70% of respondents across the media industry are at least experimenting with agentic AI, but only 18% believe the industry is ready to scale.**[1]

The same infrastructure that prepares you for a fully agentic marketplace delivers immediate, measurable results now. Publishers who become agent-ready now position themselves for what's coming and gain a competitive edge with:

- ✅ More RFPs and faster responses
- ✅ More direct business wins
- ✅ Higher CPMs thanks to enriched audience signals
- ✅ Greater efficiency that lets smaller teams to punch above their weight

Agentic Advertising Timeline (2024–2026)

Every milestone below represents real budget, real campaigns, and real agentic decision making. For publishers, this shift represents new challenges and opportunities. Agentic-readiness is critical as the technology becomes more enmeshed across the ecosystem.

2024

Agentic terminology became more widely spread.

Feb. 2025

Anthropic released Claude Sonnet 3.7, the first hybrid reasoning model on the market.

Oct. 2025

Optable introduced platform support for autonomous AI agents

Jan. 5, 2026

Optable launched Audience Agent to automate the audience creation and ad planning process

Jan. 6, 2026

IAB Tech Lab released an agentic roadmap for digital advertising

2026

Publishers are assessing agentic-readiness, and buyer agents are actively evaluating inventory.

Nov. 2024

Anthropic's Model Context Protocol (MCP) paved the path for autonomous contextual LLM behavior.

Oct. 2025

Optable and 5 other founding companies launched Ad Context Protocol (AdCP)

Dec. 2025

PubMatic and Butler/Till launched the industry's first fully autonomous CTV campaign

Jan. 5, 2026

PubMatic launched AgenticOS, an operating system designed for autonomous, agentic programmatic advertising

Jan. 6, 2026

NBCU partnered with RPA and Newton Research to test an agentic buying campaign

Agentic advertising is here

The agentic transition won't wait for anyone because it's already started. Advertising agencies have launched autonomous CTV campaigns and deployed AI operating systems.[2, 3] PubMatic's CEO, Rajeev Goel, expects that 25% of all digital advertising will be autonomously executed by 2028, and by 2030, he predicts that agentic AI will execute 50% of all campaigns.[4]

But nearly one-third of publishers have no immediate plans to invest in agentic solutions. The industry is evolving rapidly, and those who don't prioritize adaptation risk getting left in the dust.

Adopting the best tools and learning how to use them is critical, but before you can capitalize on agentic AI, you need to make sure your data is AI-ready.

25%
of all digital advertising will be autonomously executed by 2028

> "
> The advertising industry is at an inflection point where agentic systems will fundamentally reshape how buyers and sellers interact.
>
> That's precisely why we are supporting the Ad Context Protocol—open standards are essential to ensuring **this transformation benefits the entire ecosystem, not just a handful of walled gardens.**
>
> As we continue to look for ways to harness AI to unlock efficiencies and revenue opportunities while maintaining the transparency and control that open protocols provide, we see tools like [Audience] Agent as critical infrastructure for the future of publisher monetization.
>
> **David Olesnevich,** VP of Weather Data and Advertising Products
> **The Weather Company**

Signal loss and privacy regulations persist

Digital advertising optimization previously depended on third-party data, but that system is gone. Privacy regulation, combined with platform and browser restrictions, have fundamentally changed how we collect and activate data.

While this shift created pressure in the scramble for publishers to overcome signal loss, the age of agentic AI provides the perfect opportunity to excel, especially in the eyes of advertisers and agencies.

AI stands to increase the appeal of underrepresented media channels; according to IAB's State of Data 2026, buyers would increase investments in those channels by an average 5.6% in the next two years if there was demonstrable proof that AI-enhanced data was accurate and trustworthy.[5]

+5.6% spending = +$14.5 billion in estimated digital ad spend

If you've already built a first-party data strategy, you have a head start. If not, **achieving agentic and identity readiness is key.**

Efficient, data-driven decision making is key

> "
> Ad planning has needed a smarter approach for a while, and [Audience] Agent delivers. For Mediavine, it means our team can manage more campaigns without losing the quality of our audience recommendations. Most importantly, it keeps humans in control by using automation to support our standards for compliance and brand safety, not replace them.

Charlie Morris
VP of Partnerships & Data Strategy
Mediavine

Sellers with clean, data stand to benefit from agentic efficiency and insights. Agent-readiness allows publishers to participate in the agentic ecosystem with higher rates of success. Efficient, thorough audience analysis and agent-to-agent communication depend on data compatibility.

Those who don't prioritize data hygiene and AI-readiness may be dismissed by an agentic algorithm that strives for speed and scale, even if the site or platform would be a perfect match.

AI tools are only as good as the data you provide, and agents are no different. Agentic workflows fueled by quality data stand to allow teams to make better decisions more quickly.

4 Data Pillars of Agentic Audience Selling

All signals converge into a unified audience intelligence layer.

Identity graph
Resolve data into privacy-aware identity.

Audience enrichment
Add attributes and partner data to enhance audience discovery and value.

Ad platform events
Close the loop by ingesting delivery, exposure, and performance data.

Contextual signals
Activate unstructured content and intent.

Productivity and ROI are at risk

With agentic AI, the same team can win more RFPs, manage more campaigns, grow their advertising investments and CPMs, and serve more advertisers without increasing headcount or reducing quality. Buyer agents evaluate multiple publishers simultaneously and may commit to the fastest credible response.

The productivity boost directly contributes to results and ROI. Agentic campaign management reduces manual setup and troubleshooting time, allowing your team to redirect their efforts towards higher value tasks like optimizing direct deals, developing new audience packages, and managing partner relationships.

At large, the industry recognizes that AI is making waves, but proving ROI remains a challenge. According to Comcast's 2026 State of AI in TV Advertising Report, 77% of advertisers agree that AI is transforming ad buying, but 61% haven't reported meaningful results from AI integration.[6] That stands to change as the industry adopts common standards like AdCP to facilitate agent-to-agent collaboration across buyers and sellers.

PwC's 2025 AI Agent Survey found that 73% of executives predict their agentic projects will deliver value within 12 months, with 57% expecting to see measurable ROI in the same time frame.[7]

In the next 12 months...

73%
of leaders anticipate agentic AI will demonstrate value.[7]

57%
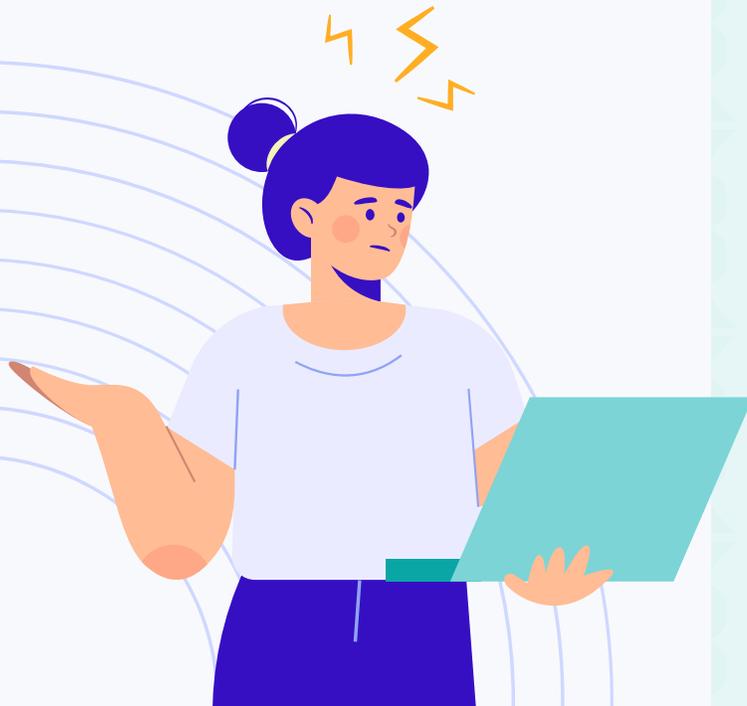expect agentic AI to produce measurable ROI.[7]

59%
will continue to invest in AI even if it isn't yet profitable.[8]

PubMatic launched the **first autonomous ad campaign** in December 2025.

They have now launched **more than 250 agentic ad campaigns** by March 2026.

Emerging sources of revenue including agentic advertising saw **75% YoY improvement** for PubMatic, accounting for **10% of overall revenue** in 2025.

Even if AI adoption doesn't contribute to measurable profit, KPMG's Q4 AI Pulse Survey found that 59% of leaders will continue strategically investing in AI.

Other publishers and platforms are already benefiting from agentic AI. Not investing in agent-readiness when your competitors are will only set you back.

"
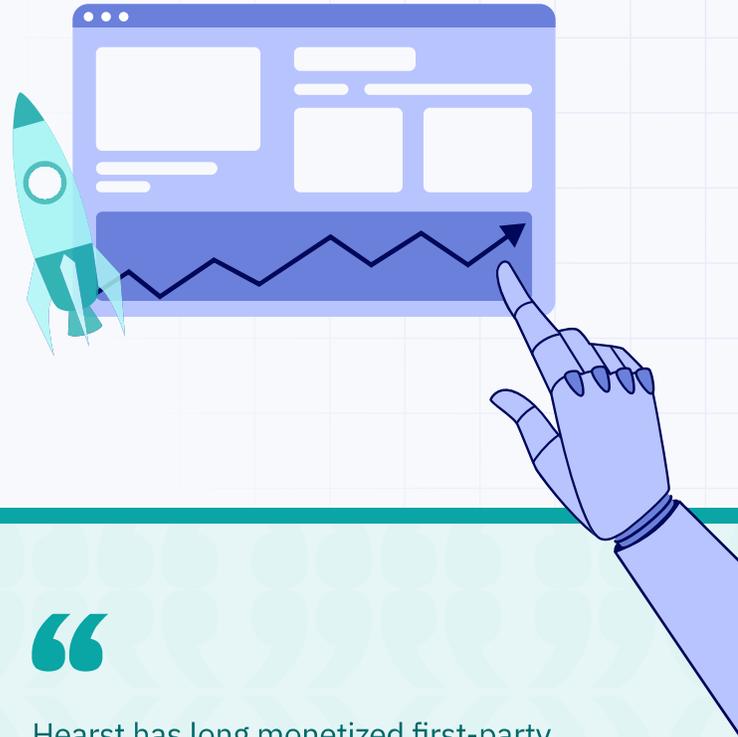
Hearst has long monetized first-party data at scale, but the next frontier is operational speed and intelligent automation. [Audience] Agent is an exciting development in the market that seeks to connect systems and agents to **automate key planning and activation steps.**

We're eager to explore how these new capabilities can help us **generate stronger proposals, streamline executions,** and **ultimately deliver better outcomes for our partners.**

Jessica Hogue
Chief Data Officer, Consumer Media
Hearst

Empowering the advertising industry with agentic AI

Before OpenRTB, programmatic buying was fragmented. OpenRTB created a standardized way for buyers and sellers to communicate about an impression in real time, unlocking a new scale of programmatic advertising.

Agentic advertising faces the same foundational problem. Buyer agents need to communicate with publisher inventory systems, but there is no shared language for agents to discover audiences, negotiate deals, or exchange context.

By 2028, Gartner, Inc. predicts that **60% of brands will use agentic AI** to streamline marketing interactions.[9] The State of Agentic Advertising Report from Optable and Digiday found that publishers hope agentic adoption will result in:

60%

of brands will use agentic AI to streamline marketing interactions by 2028

- ✓ **Increased demand** discovery for premium inventory (49%)

- ✓ **Higher yield** through better matching (46%)

- ✓ **Improved transparency** compared to programmatic channels (46%)

- ✓ **Direct relationships** with advertisers (44%)

Before brands and publishers can truly benefit from agentic AI, the industry must collaborate and align on regulatory standards to deliver consistent, fair results. The Ad Context Protocol (AdCP) was formed to facilitate this process.

AdCP is built on the same open, consortium-driven model as OpenRTB. As a founding member of AdCP, Optable joins the ranks of more than 20 forward-thinking companies aiming to standardize and modernize existing regulations.

AdCP is a platform-agnostic, open-source framework designed to standardize agentic advertising

Who it's for

Publishers	Platforms	Agencies	Tech providers

Protocol domains

Media buy

- Inventory discovery
- Cross-platform campaign
- Campaign optimization
- Real-time measurement and reporting

Governance

- Inventory list creation
- Brand alignment
- Provenance enforcement
- Third-party verification

Signals

- Signal activation
- Signal discovery
- Privacy-first audience building

Platforms

- Creative generation
- Product catalog lifecycle assessment
- Format spec discovery

Benefits

Natural language processing	Unified interface and analytics	Quick deployment

Ongoing collaboration and development	Automated workflows

When OpenRTB launched, publishers who integrated early earned more demand, better fill rates, and stronger buyer relationships, but those who delayed adoption found themselves scrambling to catch up. The same dynamic is unfolding now for buyers and sellers alike.

Sales agents

For publishers, media companies, and platforms, sales agents provide a solution to critical pain points: massive amounts of underutilized data, unclear audience markets, and the challenge of competing with walled gardens.

It's no longer sufficient to remain a passive participant in the ecosystem. Publishers instead should play a more active role in fielding queries and making deals. With a seller agent, those on the sell side gain a representative that proactively surfaces relevant inventory and rich signals

As long as your data is agent-ready, a seller agent can accurately represent your inventory and key audience to buyers (and buyer agents) in real time. Publishers who invest in agent readiness will be the ones buyer agents return to. Those who don't will find themselves invisible in an ecosystem that passes them by.

Buyer agents

On the buy side, agents are replacing time-consuming media planning with autonomous, goal-driven execution. A buyer agent can query inventory, evaluate audience signals, negotiate terms, and optimize campaigns in real time.

Buyer agents assess orderly data and evaluate signals at machine speed. Whether your inventory makes it into a buyer agent's consideration depends on five things:

Discoverability

If a buyer agent can't find your data, you don't exist.

Signal quality

Agents make decisions based on accurate, high-fidelity audience, content, and inventory signals.

Response speed

Agent-to-agent communication will bypass systems that introduce latency or require manual steps.

Deal flexibility

Publishers who can offer programmatic PMP and PG deal types as well as direct sold activation will have more options in the agentic ecosystem.

Unique packaging

Agentic buying gives publishers the opportunity to surface unique creative types, outcome-based packaging, or brand insights to advertisers they may have not otherwise reached.

Buyers are deploying agents now. Whether those agents find or bypass you depends on the decisions you make today.

Signal or audience agents

A seller agent is only as effective as the data behind it. Signal and audience agents continuously analyze data across properties, enriching your identity graph and surfacing the insights your seller agent needs to represent you accurately.

These agents handle the work happening under the surface:

They do the research and preparation so that, when a buyer agent queries your inventory, your seller agent has the right answer ready.

Optable's Audience Agent orchestrates this layer, unifying your first-party data with partner signals, enriching your identity graph, and ensuring that what your seller agent surfaces to the market is current and competitive.
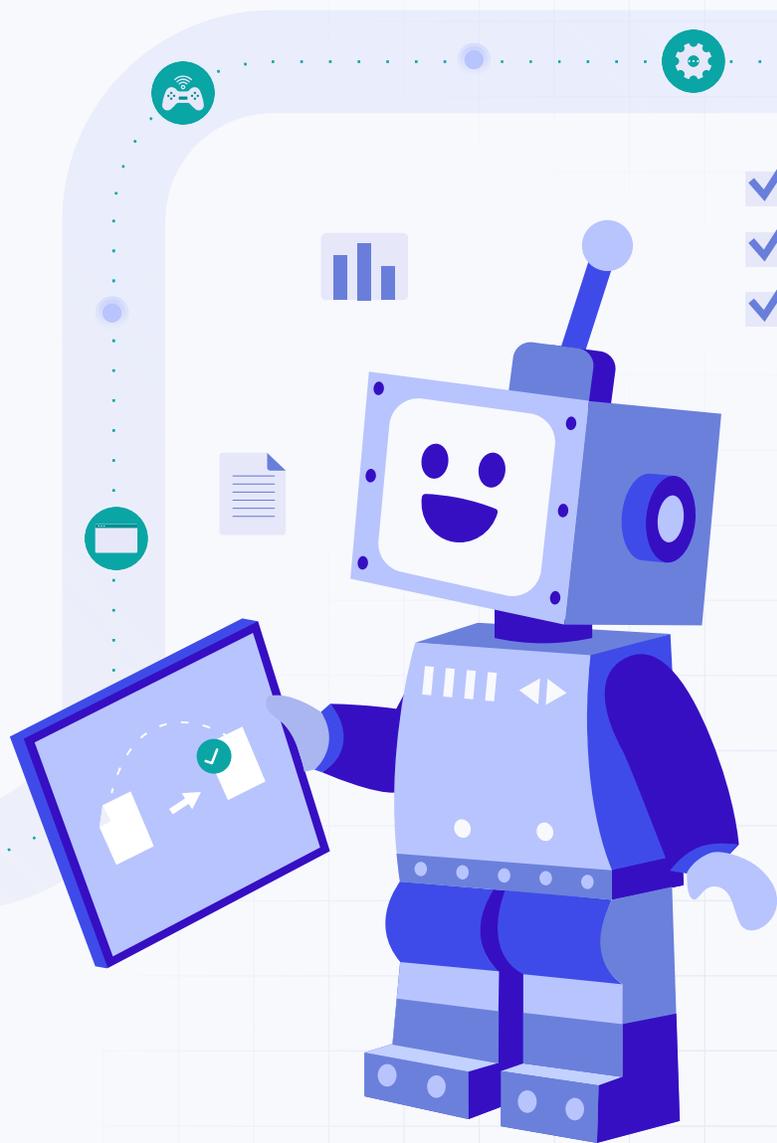
Discovering new audiences within your first-party data

Identifying patterns across targeting signals and contextual metadata

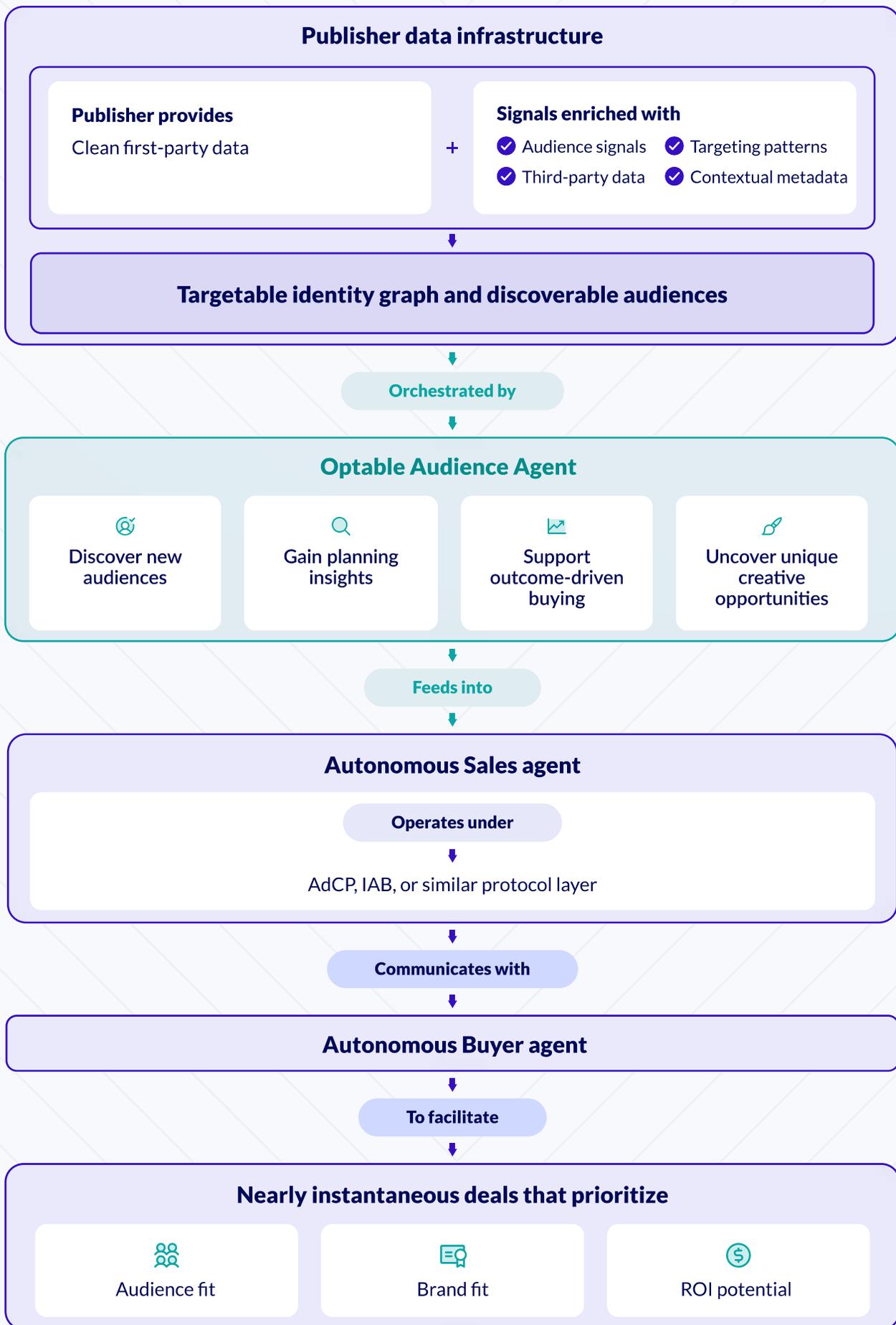Translating raw data into structured signals buyer agents look for.

The publisher and agent ecosystem

Publisher data infrastructure

Publisher provides
Clean first-party data

+

Signals enriched with
- ✓ Audience signals
- ✓ Targeting patterns
- ✓ Third-party data
- ✓ Contextual metadata

Targetable identity graph and discoverable audiences

Orchestrated by

Optable Audience Agent

Discover new audiences

Gain planning insights

Support outcome-driven buying

Uncover unique creative opportunities

Feeds into

Autonomous Sales agent

Operates under

AdCP, IAB, or similar protocol layer

Communicates with

Autonomous Buyer agent

To facilitate

Nearly instantaneous deals that prioritize

Audience fit

Brand fit

ROI potential

Addressing risks and concerns

Agentic AI is developing fast, and the honest truth is that the industry is still figuring out how best to apply the technology. Until agreed-upon standards are in place, adopting agentic AI comes with very real concerns.

Before integrating agentic systems, publishers should recognize and acknowledge the risks to hold their partners accountable and establish guardrails.

✅ **Accuracy and transparency**

Inaccurate or incomplete data allows agents to make suboptimal decisions at scale. Audit how your inventory is being represented and demand transparency from platform partners.

✅ **Security and fraud**

Without clear standards, agentic systems may introduce new fraud risks. Prioritize accountable partners with strong governance who participate in open standards like AdCP.

✅ **The walled garden advantage**

Agents optimized for closed ecosystems will deprioritize open web inventory by default. Strong first-party data, accurate signals, and collaborative standards are what set publishers apart.

✅ **Industry disruption**

Buyers are shifting toward outcome-based models and campaigns at a scale that limits relationship-based selling. Adapt by packaging inventory and data to appeal to automated decision-making.

✅ **Need for human oversight**

Define which decisions can be automated, which require review, and what needs to happen when something goes wrong. Human oversight makes agentic systems trustworthy and scalable.

All of these concerns demand a practical response that begins with clean data, a compatible infrastructure, and an informed team.

The publishers who navigate the agentic era most successfully will anticipate risks, build guardrails, and move forward.

optable

Ready to put your data to work?

The Optable platform is purpose-built to help publishers create an enriched ID graph, expose addressable audiences, and prepare for the emerging agentic marketplace.

Reach out to our team at **sales@optable.co**.

Learn more about optable.co

Sources

1. Digiday, Optable. (2026, April). *State of Agentic Advertising Report.*

2. PubMatic. (2025, December). *PubMatic and Butler/Till Launch AdCP-Enabled Agentic AI Campaign Across CTV.* https://pubmatic.com/news/pubmatic-and-butler-till-launch-adcp-enabled-agentic-ai-campaign-across-ctv/

3. AdAge. (2026, January) *How AI is transforming agencies from creative partners into tech-fueled vendors.* https://adage.com/technology/ai/aa-ad-agencies-operating-systems/

4. AdExchanger. (2026, February). *PubMatic Is All In On Agentic AI.* https://www.adexchanger.com/programmatic/pubmatic-is-all-in-on-agentic-ai/

5. Interactive Advertising Bureau. (2026, February). *State of Data 2026: The AI-Powered Measurement Transformation.* https://www.iab.com/insights/2026-state-of-data-report/

6. Comcast. (2026, January). *The 2026 Comcast Advertising Report.* https://comcastadvertising.com/insights/research-reports/2026-advertising-report/

7. PwC. (2025, May). *PwC's AI Agent Survey.* https://www.pwc.com/us/en/tech-effect/ai-analytics/ai-agent-survey.html

8. KPMG (2026, January). *KPMG AI Quarterly Pulse Survey | Q4 2025.* https://view.ceros.com/kpmg-design/kpmg-genai-study/p/1

9. Gartner. (2026, January). *Gartner Predicts 60% of Brands Will Use Agentic AI to Deliver Streamlined One-to-One Interactions by 2028.* https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2026-01-15-gartner-predicts-60-percent-of-brands-will-use-agentic-ai-to-deliver-streamlined-one-to-one-interactions-by-2028