

BUYER'S GUIDE · 2026

Standalone AI, compared: the £32 a month option and the six figure one

You no longer need to replace your phone system to put AI on your calls. But "standalone AI" now describes two completely different categories of product, and buying the wrong tier is expensive in both directions. **Here is how to tell them apart.**

THE TWO TIERS OF STANDALONE AI

TIER ONE

AI receptionists

Answer and route · from ~£20 a month

Plug into whatever phone system you already run: on premises kit, cloud, or a plain business number. Bought online, priced per 100 minutes, live in days.

- Answer every call, 24/7, in natural conversation
- Route callers, book appointments, capture leads
- Filter spam and handle FAQs from your own content
- **A front door, not a workforce**

Products: Zoom Virtual Agent Receptionist (standalone) · RingCentral AIR Everywhere

TIER TWO

Enterprise virtual agents

Resolve end to end · custom quoted

Managed deployments that resolve whole categories of calls without a human. Priced per minute on annual contracts, and worth it at serious call volumes.

- Take payments, authenticate callers, service accounts
- Manage bookings and changes across 45+ languages
- Built for compliance: PCI DSS, ISO 27001, GDPR
- **Typically live in around six weeks**

Products: Poly AI · Boost.ai

Do you need calls answered, or resolved?

Answer that one question and the shortlist picks itself. If the pain is missed calls and out of hours gaps, start at tier one; both products trial without touching your phone system. If the pain is agent cost and thousands of repeat transactional calls a month, you are shopping in tier two.

The comparison at a glance

Four products, two tiers, one honest matrix. Pricing correct as at August 2026 and subject to change; per minute rates vary with volume.

	zoom	RingCentral	PolyAI	boost.ai
	ZVA Receptionist (standalone)	RingCentral AIR Everywhere	Poly AI	Boost.ai
Tier	AI receptionist	AI receptionist	Enterprise virtual agent	Enterprise virtual agent
What it does	Answers, routes, translates live in 10+ languages, warm transfers with a summary so callers never repeat themselves	Answers, routes, filters spam, books appointments into Google and Outlook mid call, captures leads to CRM	Resolves calls end to end: payments, authentication, bookings, account servicing	Resolves across chat and voice with hybrid control over NLU and generative AI
Works with your existing phone system	Yes, no Zoom Phone required	Yes, no RingEX required; SIP or call forwarding	Yes, integrates with major contact centre platforms	Yes, deploys alongside existing infrastructure
UK pricing	Volume based, roughly 20p per minute for voice as a guide	From £32 a month including 100 minutes, extra bundles available	Custom quoted, per minute billing on annual contracts	Custom quoted
How you buy	Online, with a free trial	Online, quick setup	Managed deployment, typically live in around six weeks	Managed deployment
Languages	Live translation in 10+ languages	UK and Australian English, Spanish, French	45+ languages	Broad multilingual coverage
Compliance posture	Zoom platform standards	RingCentral platform standards	PCI DSS, HIPAA, SOC 2	ISO 27001, ISO 27701, GDPR; Gartner MQ Leader 2025
Right for you if	You want an AI front door this month, at the lowest cost of entry	You want the same, with strong calendar booking and CRM capture	High call volumes are costing serious money and you want them resolved, not routed	You are in a regulated sector and need control and auditability above all

● AI receptionist tier ● Enterprise virtual agent tier

Sources: published pricing and product announcements from Zoom, RingCentral, Poly AI and Boost.ai, August 2026. ZVA Receptionist UK rate is an indicative partner guide; confirm against your volumes.

THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU BUY ANY OF THEM

1

What are your top five call types by volume?

Your call data decides the tier, not the demo.

2

What does a contained call actually save you?

Receptionists save missed revenue; virtual agents save agent time.

3

What happens when the AI gets it wrong?

Ask about escalation paths, warm transfer and audit trails.

Not sure which tier you are in? That is the conversation we have every week.

Fortay Connect works across all four of these products and every major platform underneath them. Our advice starts with your call data, not with a product we would rather sell. It is free, and it usually saves money.

[Talk to an expert →](#)