

Before You Switch On an AI Receptionist or Chatbot

By Scott Farrell — LeverageAI · dental.leverageai.com.au/about

An AI receptionist is the most-pitched AI product in dentistry — and often the least safe to switch on first. It collects health details and stores them somewhere you may not have checked.

Before You Switch On an AI Receptionist or Chatbot

Prepared for Example Dental Clinic, Sydney · 15 Jun 2026 · part of your private Dental AI Blueprint. Review and adapt before adopting — general guidance, not legal advice.

An AI receptionist is the most-pitched AI in dentistry, and frequently the least safe first project. It collects patient health details and stores them — the only question is where, and who can see them.

This is general educational material for dental practice owners and managers, not legal or clinical advice. This guide is the *pre-purchase readiness* check; the [Emergency Booking and the AI Boundary](#) guide covers the urgent-patient handling boundary in depth.

Two privacy laws apply in NSW. As well as the Commonwealth *Privacy Act 1988* and its Australian Privacy Principles (APPs), dental practices in NSW are also bound by the NSW *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* (HRIP Act) and its Health Privacy Principles (HPPs). Read the considerations here against both. General information, not legal advice.

Why this matters

AI receptionists, booking bots and website chat widgets are being sold to practices as an easy win. But unlike an internal tool, this one **talks directly to patients** and **collects health information** — a patient describing a toothache, swelling or symptoms is providing health data, often after hours, into a system you may not have vetted.

That makes it a poor *first* AI project for many practices: it sits at the most sensitive point (a patient in distress sharing symptoms) and the data flows straight out to a vendor — the [extraction problem](#), but with the patient doing the typing.

Readiness questions — ask before you sign

Data and storage

- Where are conversations stored, and for how long?
- Is storage or processing **overseas**? (If so, treat it as an **APP 8 / HPP** review item.)
- Who at the vendor can access the conversations? Can the practice delete them?
- Does the vendor's contract or data-processing agreement actually address this, or just reassure you verbally?

The clinical boundary (the big one)

- Does the tool ever **assess urgency or symptoms**? It must **not** make clinical assessments or tell a patient whether their symptoms are serious — that is a clinician's job.
- Is there a clear, fast **escalation to a human**, especially for anything that sounds urgent?

Consent and notice

- Are patients told their conversation is collected and how it's used (a privacy notice that covers this channel)?
- Does the tool collect more than it needs (full symptom descriptions when a name and callback number would do)?

These are the receptionist-specific version of the questions every AI vendor should answer. For the general seven-question checklist to run against *any* AI tool before you sign, see [What to Ask an AI Vendor Before You Say Yes](#).

What good looks like

- **Don't make it your first AI project.** Start somewhere lower-stakes; come to patient-facing AI once the basics are in place.
- **Scope it tightly.** Booking and admin — not triage, not clinical advice.
- **Check the data flow before go-live**, not after: storage location, access, deletion, overseas processing.
- **Guarantee human escalation** for urgent or symptom-heavy messages.
- **Cover it in your privacy notice** and collect the minimum.

This guide is educational material only. It is not legal or clinical advice. Identifying a risky workflow indicates possible exposure, not a declared breach. Seek qualified advice for your specific circumstances.

Disclaimer: Educational guidance only, not legal advice. This guide is intended for practice workflow education. Do not enter patient-identifiable information into public AI tools.

Author: Scott Farrell, LeverageAI — scott@leverageai.com.au · <https://dental.leverageai.com.au>