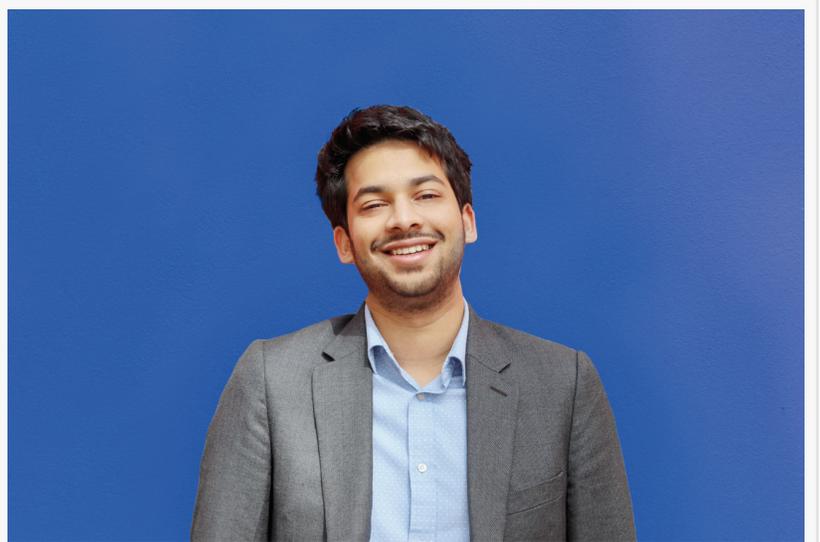


# 'Digital deadlock': SMEs in UK lack talent to deploy AI agents

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, February 11, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As the initial hype of generative AI transitions into a high-stakes race for operational efficiency, small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) across the United Kingdom are hitting a "Digital Deadlock."

New industry data reveals that while 71% of UK businesses have invested in AI tools this year, 40% of SMEs admit they lack the internal expertise to actually deploy and manage autonomous AI agents. (According to the British Chambers of Commerce / Pertemps Employment Trends Report.)



Riaz Moola

Following the January "reality check" period, where businesses traditionally set annual tech budgets, a stark divide has emerged. British firms are discovering that simply purchasing AI software licenses is no longer enough; the true bottleneck is a critical shortage of "Agentic" developers: specialised engineers capable of building systems that do not just "chat," but take action.

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The UK market is reaching a point of stagnation because we've focused too much on the 'AI as a tool' narrative and not enough on 'AI as an architected system.'"

*Riaz Moola*

Riaz Moola, founder and CEO of HyperionDev, believes this skills gap is the single greatest threat to the UK's SME sector in 2026.

"The UK market is reaching a point of stagnation because

we've focused too much on the 'AI as a tool' narrative and not enough on 'AI as an architected system,'" says Moola.

"SMEs are realising that an off-the-shelf chatbot cannot manage a supply chain or reconcile complex financial data. For that, you need 'Agentic' developers, people who can design

autonomous workflows. Without them, the 'Digital Deadlock' will see thousands of small businesses left behind by larger competitors who can afford to hoard this rare talent."

Traditional software development focused on creating tools for humans to use. In contrast, "Agentic" development involves creating AI agents that can reason, use tools, and complete multi-step goals independently.

For a UK SME, this could mean the difference between a manual customer service desk and an AI agent that can autonomously process refunds, verify identities, and update CRM records simultaneously.

However, the UK's digital skills gap is currently costing the economy an estimated £23 billion per year. With 20% of the existing tech sector lacking essential advanced digital skills, the leap to Agentic AI feels insurmountable for many.

Moola suggests that the solution for SMEs is not to compete with Big Tech for £150k-a-year Silicon Valley hires, but to focus on "Radical Reskilling" and architectural readiness:

- Move Beyond the 'Prompt': Stop training staff only on how to write better prompts. Instead, focus on "AI Orchestration", understanding how to connect AI to existing company data and APIs.
- Prioritise data hygiene: AI agents are only as effective as the data they access. SMEs must "put their house in order" by structuring legacy data before attempting to automate it.
- The 6-month rule: With recent changes to UK employment law reducing the unfair dismissal qualifying period to six months, the risk of hiring the "wrong" talent is higher. Businesses should look for "proven-output" credentials and practical portfolios over traditional degrees.

"We are at a crossroads," Moola concludes.

"The AI revolution won't be won by the companies with the biggest budgets, but by those who realise that 'buying' AI is a commodity, while 'managing' AI is the new gold standard of business survival."

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#### About HyperionDev

- HyperionDev is a leading global provider of online education, founded in 2012 to tackle the growing digital skills shortage.
- The company co-delivers and co-markets short courses and bootcamps with leading universities in high-demand fields such as AI, data science, cybersecurity, digital marketing, and leadership.
- Through mentor-led, real-world training, HyperionDev has helped thousands of students launch successful careers around the world.

□ Learn more at [www.hyperiondev.com](http://www.hyperiondev.com)

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