REDWOOD STACKS · FREE RESOURCE

Half true.

The most convincing AI ROI spreadsheets are not wrong. They are half right, and that is what moves budgets. Here is one, audited row by row.

GUIDE · 6 PAGES

STEP 1 · THE PITCH

The sheet, as it is sold.

	HUMAN SDR	AI SDR
Annual cost	~$140K fully loaded	from $900 / mo
Meetings	8–12 a month	“unlimited”
Coverage	8 hours × 5 days	24 / 7
Ramp	~3 months	instant
Turnover	~14–16 month tenure	never quits

On this sheet it is not close. If it is right, hiring salespeople is malpractice. **So is it right?**

Compensation: Bridge Group research plus a standard 1.25–1.4x fully-loaded multiplier. AI pricing: published 2026 entry tiers.

STEP 2 · THE AUDIT

Row by row.

✓ Speed to lead is real.
Most companies answer a lead in roughly 42 hours. A machine answers in seconds.

✓ The $140K human cost is real.
Casual comparisons usually understate it.

× "Converts X% of leads" has no measured source.
Whose funnel? At what volume?

× Same revenue per deal, in both columns.
They are different deals. Machines book the easy ones, so the average shifts.

× $900 / mo, flat.
Closer to $5–8K / mo at real volume, plus setup and a supervising human.

× A 100% chance it works.
Gartner expects more than 40% of agentic AI projects may be canceled by the end of 2027.

STEP 3 · THE CORRECTED SHEET

Honest math comes in ranges.

	HUMAN SDR	AI SDR, ALL IN
Cost	~$140K, ramp and turnover priced in	platform + usage + setup + a supervising human
Output	8–12 meetings, complex deals	different, usually smaller deals
Risk	known	discounted for the chance it is canceled

The paradox survives, smaller and conditional. Worse-but-instant beats better-but-absent for specific jobs: instant inbound response, after hours, overflow. Not the six-conversation deals.

Buy it for the failure mode it fixes. Not the headcount it claims to replace.

BEFORE YOU SIGN

Two questions dissolve most of it.

Who measured each number?

Ask for the funnel it came from and the volume it was measured at.

Why is revenue per deal the same in both columns?

If the two columns book different deals, the totals were never comparable.

If nobody can answer either one, you are not looking at a comparison. You are looking at two unrelated numbers in the same table.

Got a sheet like this in front of you?

The AI Discovery Session is a free 30-minute triage call. Bring the numbers you have been shown and we will pressure-test them together, before you sign anything.

Book a free Discovery Session

redwoodstacks.ai · Practical AI for real businesses.