FROM WHO PAYS FOR THE AI?, BY CAL RENSHAW

The Cost Sheet

One page per feature with a model inside it. Fill it in before you build, and again every time the sum changes: a new model, a new price, a new kind of customer. Keep the old sheets. The history is the useful part.

The unit

What one press of the button causes

One quote, one document read, one reply drafted. In the customer's words.

What one unit costs

From 30 real inputs, run the way the product will run them, with the check included. Write the figure near the expensive end, not the middle.

Retries

What share of attempts fail and go round again. Add that share to the unit cost.

The customer

The heaviest sensible customer's busiest week

Asked, not guessed. Who you asked, and when.

Their month

The busiest week times 4.

Their model fees a month

The unit cost times their month.

The price

The price, and its shape

Flat with a written limit, an allowance with a charge above it, or metered.

The ratio

Their model fees a month divided by the price. Under a tenth, build it. Over a tenth, pick one of the 4 ways out (code, a cheaper model, a different shape, a higher price) and fill in a new sheet.

The locks

Sign-in before any model call
Yes or no.

Limit per account, in your code
The number, and what happens when it's reached.

Daily ceiling in your loop
The ordinary number, and the higher one for the days the calendar warns you about.

Hard cap at the provider
The number, and the date you last watched it fire.

The door

Where every model call goes through
The one place in the code.

How long inputs and outputs are kept
And where your terms say so.

The second option
The model you would move to, roughly what it costs, and whether it passes your check.

The stop

The number at which this feature has to justify itself
Mine is a tenth of the price for 2 months running.

Who you'd tell, and how, if you switched it off.

Cal Renshaw, The Cost Sheet, from Who Pays for the AI? (Verity Publishing). calrenshaw.com/tools/cost-sheet. Free to copy and use; please keep this line.