

PACT

A protocol and operating system for **agent-to-agent negotiation**, purpose-built for SMBs.

100	\$1M	4	3
PILOT MERCHANTS	GMV / 90D	PRIMITIVES	RISKS DEFUSED

The agentic checkout is here. Buyer agents will price-shop, bundle, and negotiate on behalf of consumers — at machine speed, across thousands of merchants in parallel. PACT gives small and mid-sized merchants a defensible way to participate without being dragged into a race to the bottom.

Authors · AirShelf Research | Version · 1.0 | Status · Pilot

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why agentic commerce needs a negotiation layer.

Within 24 months, a meaningful share of commerce will be initiated by autonomous buyer agents acting on behalf of consumers. These agents will not browse — they will negotiate. They will request discounts, bundles, faster shipping, and better warranty terms, and they will do it across hundreds of merchants in parallel.

Today's commerce stack has no answer. Static product pages can't respond. Discount codes don't compose. Live chat doesn't scale to machine traffic. The merchants who ignore this will lose margin to whoever has the best buyer-side model. The merchants who race to the bottom will lose the business outright.

PACT is a protocol for agent-to-agent negotiation. Buyer agents send signed Negotiation Intent Objects. Merchants compile signed Counter-Offer in real time from no-code Playbooks. Every exchange is audited, exportable, and chargeback-defensible.

This paper describes the protocol, the four primitives that compose it, the three failure modes it defuses, and the go-to-market wedge AirShelf is using to ship it: a Shopify app for high-AOV DTC merchants in fitness, furniture, and electronics accessories.

THE PROBLEM

Three failure modes of agentic checkout.

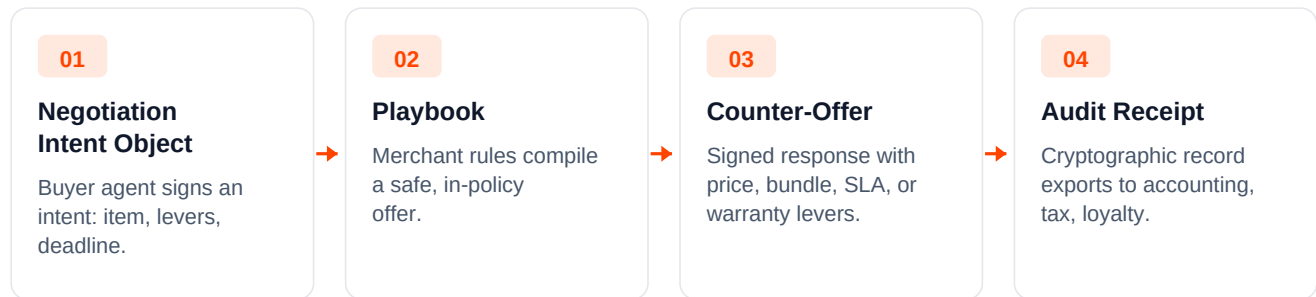
Agentic commerce introduces failure modes that classical commerce rails — checkout, promo codes, CRM — cannot absorb. The next three are structural, not implementation bugs. They will not be fixed by better prompts or larger models.

FAILURE MODE		HOW PACT DEFUSES IT
Imperceptible inequality	model-quality	A buyer running a frontier model will out-negotiate a buyer running a small open-source model. Without a counter-offer protocol, merchants either over-discount the strong agents or under-serve the weak ones. PACT compiles the same in-policy offer for any incoming agent — floor and bundle logic hold regardless of the buyer's model.
Prompt jailbreaking	injection and	Buyer agents can be coerced — by adversarial sellers, by their own users, or by hijacked context — into agreeing to terms outside the merchant's intent. Signed Counter-Offer Objects give merchants a chargeback-defensible record of what was agreed, by whom, and under what constraints, independent of buyer model behavior.
Adversarial agent attention	optimization for	Once agents become the buyers, the SEO playbook collapses into a price-only race. Playbooks reward value moves — faster ship, better warranty, bundles — over raw price. It is the only durable way SMBs survive an agentic checkout.

THE PROTOCOL

Four primitives. One signed exchange.

PACT is built from four cryptographically signed primitives. They compose into a single round-trip negotiation that completes in under 200ms and produces a structured audit trail at every step.



Negotiation Intent Object (NIO)

A signed envelope from the buyer agent. It declares the item or category, hard constraints (delivery window, max price, required attributes), soft levers the buyer is willing to trade (e.g. extended warranty for a higher price), a deadline, and a proof of intent — typically a wallet signature or merchant-issued session token. Merchants verify the NIO before any pricing logic runs.

No-Code Playbook

The merchant's policy, expressed as composable rules over cost, stock, warranty, SLA, and bundle logic. Playbooks are authored in a visual editor, version-controlled, and compiled into a deterministic decision graph. Every counter-offer the merchant returns is provably in-policy — there is no LLM in the pricing path.

Counter-Offer Object

A signed response with price, bundle, shipping, warranty, and SLA terms. Counter-Offers are valid for a bounded TTL and are not re-issuable — once accepted, the merchant is bound. Once expired, they cannot be replayed.

Audit Receipt

A structured trail of the full exchange — NIO, Playbook version, Counter-Offer, acceptance — exportable to accounting, tax, loyalty, and chargeback systems. Receipts are the closest equivalent the agentic web has to a contract.

WHY PLAYBOOKS, NOT PROMPTS

Determinism is the product.

An LLM in the merchant pricing path is a liability. It can be jailbroken, it drifts under load, and it cannot be reasoned about by a finance team. PACT makes a deliberate architectural choice: the buyer can be agentic; the merchant must be deterministic.

“The buyer brings the model. The merchant brings the contract.”

Playbooks compile to a decision graph the merchant can simulate, diff, and roll back. Every counter-offer is the output of a known program over known inputs. When a CFO asks why a \$1,200 treadmill went out at \$1,089 with a 3-year warranty bundle, the answer is a playbook version hash and a structured receipt — not a chat transcript.

What Playbooks express well

- Floors per SKU, per category, per channel, per time window.
- Bundle logic that rewards margin-positive add-ons over raw discount.
- SLA upgrades (faster ship, white-glove install) as negotiation levers.
- Warranty extensions and loyalty credits as non-cash concessions.
- Hard policy caps that hold regardless of buyer model behavior.

GO-TO-MARKET

A Shopify app for high-AOV DTC.

PACT ships first as a Shopify app. The wedge is high-AOV DTC categories where margin per negotiation is high enough to justify a counter-offer engine, and where merchants already feel the pressure of price-comparison agents: fitness gear, furniture, electronics accessories.

Why Shopify, why now

- Shopify owns the SMB long tail PACT is designed for.
- App install removes integration friction — Playbooks deploy in under an hour.
- Shopify Functions and Checkout Extensions give us a clean place to bind Counter-Offers.
- ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Anthropic agentic checkout flows are all live or in pilot in 2026.

100	\$1M	<200ms
PILOT MERCHANTS — 90D	NEGOTIATED GMV — 90D	COUNTER-OFFER LATENCY

The pilot is open. AirShelf is onboarding the first cohort of high-AOV DTC merchants now. Pilots run on a fixed-fee basis with a negotiated success metric tied to recovered margin and lift on agent-driven traffic.

THE WEDGE AND BEYOND

From Shopify app to commerce protocol.

The Shopify app is the wedge, not the destination. Once Counter-Offer Objects are the default unit of agentic commerce, PACT becomes the neutral negotiation layer between any buyer agent and any merchant backend. The same primitives that bind a Shopify checkout today will bind BigCommerce, WooCommerce, and headless storefronts tomorrow.

Three horizons

Horizon 1 — Shopify wedge. 100 merchants, \$1M negotiated GMV, fitness / furniture / electronics accessories.

Horizon 2 — Multi-platform. BigCommerce, WooCommerce, custom storefronts. PACT becomes a neutral protocol.

Horizon 3 — Settlement and receipts. Audit Receipts as the chargeback-defensible record class for agentic commerce.

“The agentic checkout is the largest re-pricing event in commerce since the launch of Amazon Prime. PACT is the protocol that lets SMBs survive it.”

CONTACT

AirShelf · airshelf.ai · Pilots: pilots@airshelf.ai

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