A GUIDE TO EVALUATING

End-To-End AP Automation

A practical guide for justifying the investment, evaluating AP automation vendors, and choosing a platform that sets your team up for long-term success.

Content

Intro

Accounts payable has become more than a back-office function – it is a critical part of financial strategy. This guide is built for finance leaders who are ready to take the next step in modernizing AP but need the right plan, the right partner, and a clear case for change. Inside, you will find practical insights on building the business case for automation, understanding what true end-to-end AP looks like, comparing vendor capabilities, and preparing your organization for a successful rollout. Whether you are just starting to explore solutions or refining your evaluation criteria, this guide will help you move forward with clarity, confidence, and a smarter approach to AP.

The State of Accounting:

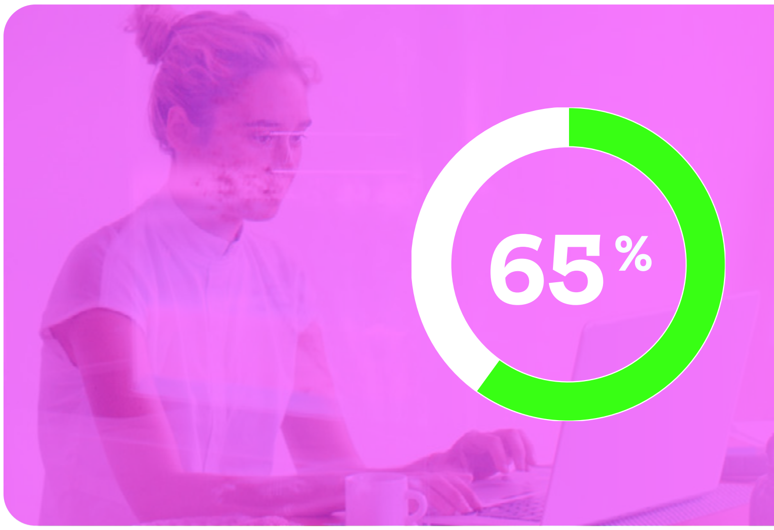
Evolving Beyond Basic Automation

Automation, once considered a forward-thinking advantage, is now simply the baseline. The real question isn't whether you've automated—it's whether you've empowered your teams to level up to do their best work. Most organizations have moved past paper invoices and filing cabinets, adopting digital tools to streamline the basics. But for many AP teams, the journey stopped at "good enough" and the reality is that "good enough" is no longer cutting it.

Finance leaders are being asked to reduce costs, increase agility, and deliver real-time insights with leaner teams and greater complexity. **Yet 63% of AP departments still rely on manual data entry, and nearly half are managing their workflows across three or more disconnected systems.** These gaps create delays, increase risk, and make it harder to close the books with confidence.

While the adoption of AI in finance is growing, most deployments are limited in scope. Currently, 91% of finance leaders report using or piloting AI, but the majority are applying it to isolated tasks like document capture or invoice classification. They're replacing paper with pixels but missing the bigger opportunity: transforming transaction processors into strategic financial partners. Without a connected system that extends through approvals, payments, reconciliation, and reporting, automation remains fragmented and the strategic impact remains limited.

Organizations that have embraced end-to-end automation are seeing measurable results. Invoice processing times have improved by up to 65%, exception rates have dropped significantly, and finance teams are gaining clearer visibility into spend and cash flow. These are not incremental improvements. They are transformative shifts in how finance operates.



Invoice processing times have improved by up to 65%, exception rates have dropped significantly, and finance teams are gaining clearer visibility into spend and cash flow.

The gap between automated and truly optimized is wider than many realize. In the next section, we break down where most organizations are today and how to avoid the common pitfalls of partial automation.

Automation Adoption:

Where Are We Now?

Most finance leaders understand the value of automation. The benefits are well documented: faster processing, fewer errors, better visibility, and stronger internal controls.

Yet despite this widespread awareness, many organizations are still operating with fragmented, manual processes that slow teams down and limit strategic impact.

So what is holding them back? For many CFOs and Controllers, the hesitation stems from a few key concerns:

1. RISK

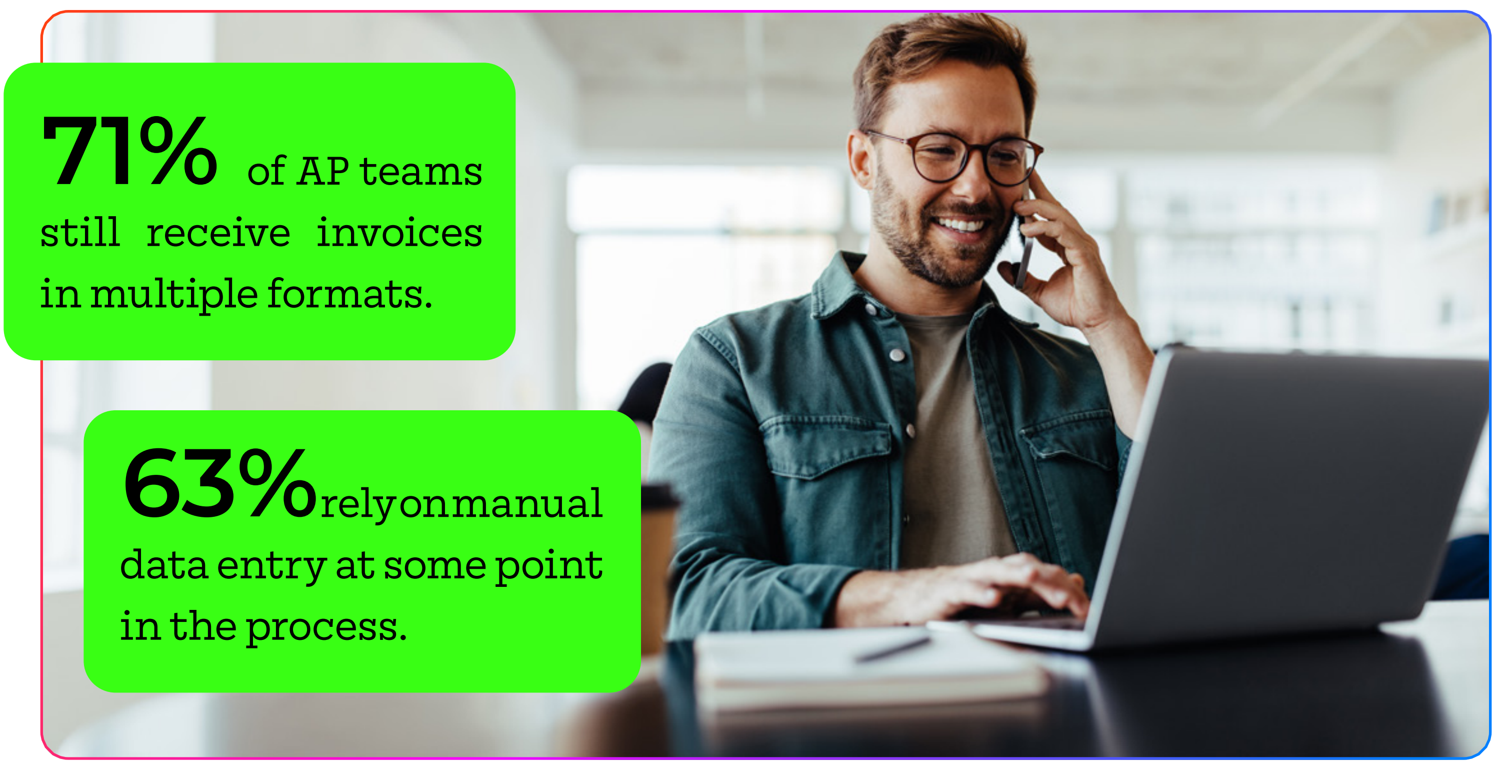
Disrupting current workflows, selecting the wrong technology, or investing in a solution that does not integrate well or deliver ROI.

2. COMPETING PRIORITIES.

Based on our recent poll of accounting professionals, 49% said other pressing projects such as ERP integrations or cross-functional technology initiatives are the primary reason AP automation has not moved forward.

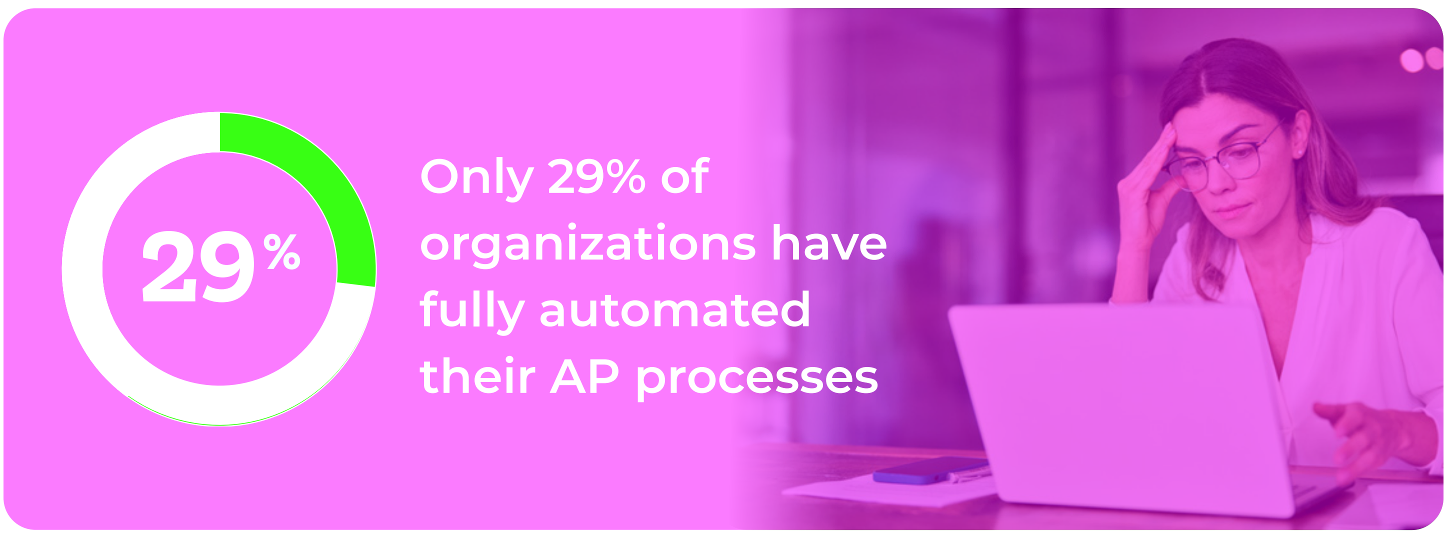
While these concerns are valid, especially in organizations where finance teams are already stretched thin and change feels like one more burden, perhaps it's time to shift the conversation from automation to empowerment – from eliminating inefficiency to unlocking potential.

Research from Ardent Partners shows that 71% of AP teams still receive invoices in multiple formats, and 63% rely on manual data entry at some point in the process. These inefficiencies contribute to higher error rates, missed discounts, and late payments. The average cost to manually process a single invoice remains above ten dollars, and approval timelines stretch beyond eight days. These timelines grow even longer in organizations without centralized systems.



Even more concerning, AP teams without automation often operate without real-time visibility. That means finance leaders are making cash flow decisions based on outdated or incomplete data. In an environment where interest rates and supplier expectations are shifting quickly, this lack of agility can lead to missed opportunities and increased financial exposure.

Partial automation adds to the problem. According to Levvel Research, only 29% of organizations have fully automated their AP processes, while the majority remain partially automated with disconnected tools and manual interventions. When invoice capture is digital but payments are still manual, or when approvals happen in email while reporting is stuck in spreadsheets, the disconnect leads to duplicate effort and audit risk. In the same study, 47% of organizations cited a lack of visibility into invoice and payment status as a top challenge. This is a direct result of fragmented systems.



The truth is that good enough is not sustainable.

Organizations that fail to move beyond partial automation fall behind not just operationally but strategically. They struggle to scale. They spend too much time fixing errors. They lose leverage in supplier negotiations. And they miss the insights that come from having a real-time, end-to-end view of financial operations.

The good news is that progress is not about perfection. It is about momentum. The next step is understanding what true end-to-end automation looks like and how it transforms the way finance teams work, measure success, and deliver value to the business. It's about elevating the brainwork by automating the busywork.

As one finance leader put it:

Finally, my team can stop chasing paper and start driving the business.

What Does It Really Mean to Be End-to-End?

From invoice capture to approval routing, payments, reconciliation, and reporting, every action happens within a single platform that integrates directly with your ERP. End-to-end isn't just about connecting processes—it's about elevating entire departments from transaction processors to strategic financial partners.

This level of integration is what gives finance leaders real-time visibility into liabilities, cash flow, and supplier activity. Without it, teams are left stitching together data from disconnected systems, often relying on spreadsheets and workarounds to answer basic questions.

According to Levvel Research, organizations with fully automated, integrated AP systems report **70% faster invoice approval times** and significantly fewer late payments compared to those using fragmented tools.

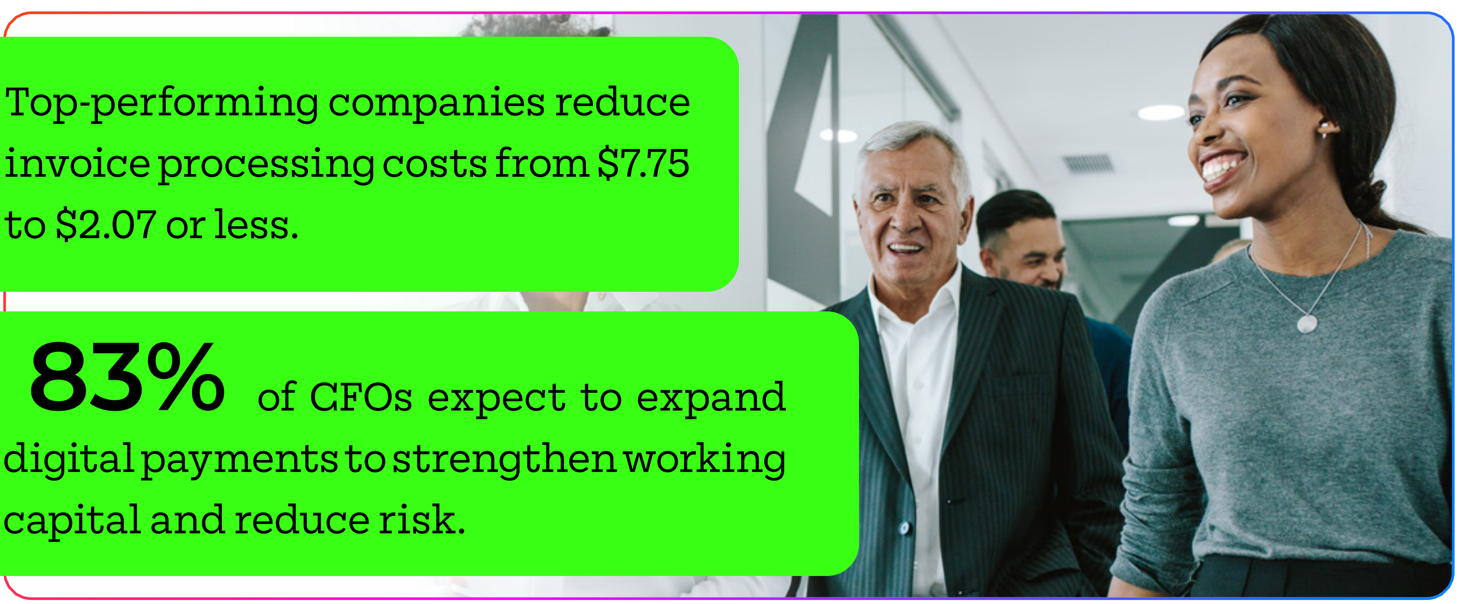
Partial automation often leaves the most critical steps - approvals, payments, and reporting - outside the system. That means duplicate data entry, inconsistent records, and limited insight.

True end-to-end automation ensures that every invoice is tracked, every payment is controlled, and every transaction flows back into the ERP without manual intervention. The result is a unified, reliable process that reduces risk, improves accuracy, and gives CFOs the control and clarity they need to make smarter financial decisions. Automation isn't the goal. Empowerment is. And when your finance function transforms from a cost center to a strategic asset, you've achieved what automation alone never could.

The Role of Payments in AP Automation

Payments are often the final mile of the AP process, but they are also where many organizations lose the most time, control, and visibility. Even when invoice automation is in place, payments are frequently handled through separate systems or manual processes. This creates unnecessary delays, increases fraud risk, and makes reconciliation more difficult.

When payments are integrated into AP automation, they become a strategic advantage. Organizations that embed payments into their workflows see reduced processing time, fewer errors, and stronger supplier relationships. According to APQC, top-performing companies reduce invoice processing costs from $7.75 to $2.07 or less.



Top-performing companies reduce invoice processing costs from $7.75 to $2.07 or less.

83% of CFOs expect to expand digital payments to strengthen working capital and reduce risk.

Gartner reports that 83% of CFOs expect to expand digital payments to strengthen working capital and reduce risk. When payments, approvals, and reconciliation are fully connected, finance leaders gain faster access to real-time data and actionable insights.

Before we dive into how different methods stack up, here are the most common options a modern AP platform should support:

- ACH
- Enhanced ACH
- Virtual Cards
- Wire Transfers
- Checks

Exploring Payment Methods: Pros and Cons

Not all payment methods are created equal. A modern AP platform should support multiple options so finance teams can choose the best fit for each transaction based on cost, speed, and security.

Payment Method	Pros	Cons
ACH	Low cost, widely accepted, easy to automate	Slower settlement times, limited use internationally
Enhanced ACH	Faster settlement, richer remittance data, better supplier matching	May require onboarding, not all banks support advanced features
Virtual Cards	High security, rebates on spend, reduced fraud risk	Not all suppliers accept them, requires supplier onboarding
Wire Transfers	Fast, reliable for international and high-value transactions	High fees, manual entry, no recall once sent
Checks	Universally accepted, familiar for legacy vendors	Expensive, slow, high fraud risk, labor intensive

Why it matters: A flexible payment strategy supports supplier relationships, protects against fraud, and helps maximize efficiency. The right platform puts every method in reach – all in one place.

The Business Impact of End-to-End Automation

End-to-end automation is not just about making accounts payable more efficient. It transforms AP from a manual, tactical function into a strategic driver of financial performance. When the entire workflow, from invoice capture to payment and reconciliation, is connected and automated, the impact is felt across the business.

Finance teams gain time, visibility, and control. Manual tasks like data entry, chasing approvals, and logging payments are replaced by streamlined workflows, real-time insights, and better decisions.

According to Gartner, organizations that adopt digital payment solutions as part of their AP automation strategy see an average 25% improvement in working capital performance and a 30% reduction in overall invoice processing time. These results are only possible when payments are fully integrated, not managed in disconnected systems.

FORRESTER®

Additional research from Forrester shows that companies using end-to-end AP automation report:

1 MILLION
in average cost savings over three years

80%
improvement in invoice processing speed

FEWER PAYMENT ERRORS
and significantly improved supplier satisfaction

These efficiencies drive measurable outcomes:

- **Lower processing costs.** Reducing manual steps directly cuts labor and error correction costs.
- **Faster approvals and payments.** Quicker cycle times help capture early payment discounts and improve supplier terms.
- **Better cash flow visibility.** Real-time insight into liabilities, payments, and approvals supports stronger forecasting and control.
- **Reduced risk and fraud.** Embedded payments offer better tracking, stronger controls, and fewer points of failure.
- **Scalability.** Automated processes adapt quickly to changes in volume, structure, or priorities.

These are not small gains. They are transformational shifts in how finance teams operate and influence business strategy.

Before automation, we were spending hours just tracking down invoice statuses. Now, everything is in one place, approvals happen faster, and we have full visibility into what's going out. It's made a massive difference in how we manage cash flow.

Director of Finance
Mid-Market Manufacturing Company

Getting Ready for End-to-End Automation

Recognizing the need for automation is an important first step. But moving forward requires preparation. You need the right people involved, a clear view of your current process, and a plan to prioritize AP automation even when other projects are competing for attention.

Many AP leaders find themselves in this exact situation. In our recent poll of accounting professionals, 49% said other initiatives like ERP upgrades or cross-functional technology projects are the main reason automation has not been implemented. That is understandable, but delaying AP automation comes at a cost.

The good news is that you do not need to wait. In fact, automating AP can make those larger projects run more smoothly by eliminating manual work and improving data quality. The key is to start with what you can control and build internal alignment around a clear set of goals.

Here are five actions you can take to get ready:

- → Document your current process. Identify how invoices are received, routed, approved, paid, and reported. Look for delays, manual steps, or compliance risks.
- → Identify internal champions. Engage people in AP, finance, and IT who understand the current challenges and can advocate for change.
- → Assess your organizational readiness. Consider how your team responds to change and what lessons can be applied from past technology rollouts.
- → Tie automation to strategic outcomes. Frame the value of automation around the goals your leadership team already cares about, such as faster close cycles or better cash flow visibility.
- → Start with a focused rollout. Choose a specific entity, invoice type, or supplier group to pilot and expand from there based on early success.

Being ready does not mean having everything figured out. It means taking a thoughtful, informed approach that builds momentum and sets your team up for success

Readiness Checklist:

Is Your AP Team Ready for Automation?

✓	Step	Why It Matters
	Have we documented our current AP process from invoice receipt to payment?	Knowing your starting point helps identify inefficiencies and opportunities.
	Do we have internal champions who support automation in AP, finance, or IT?	Champions help build buy-in and drive momentum.
	Have we aligned automation with our broader finance or digital strategy?	Tying AP automation to larger goals increases executive support.
	Are we aware of the key blockers that have slowed past tech initiatives?	Anticipating roadblocks helps avoid repeat delays.
	Can we identify a pilot area to begin automation with measurable outcomes?	A focused rollout allows for early wins and smarter scaling.

Tip: You do not need to check every box to get started.
The goal is progress, not perfection.

Defining What Your Organization Needs

Once your team is aligned and ready to take action, the next step is getting clear on what you actually need from an AP automation solution. This is not just about choosing features. It is about defining the outcomes your business requires and the challenges you want to solve.

Start by looking inward. Every organization is at a different stage of maturity. Some are drowning in paper invoices. Others may have automated some steps but still deal with disconnected systems or workarounds. Understanding your current environment is critical before you engage with vendors.

Here are five actions you can take to get ready:

- Where are the most time-consuming or error-prone steps in our current process?
- How many different systems are involved in invoice approvals, payments, and reporting?
- How easily can we track what has been paid, what is pending, and what is overdue?
- Do we need to support multiple entities, locations, or currencies?
- How important is it that the solution integrates with our ERP or accounting system?

The answers to these questions will help you build a short list of non-negotiables. For many finance teams, the must-haves include deep ERP integration, support for multiple payment methods, strong audit trails, and visibility into the entire invoice-to-payment process.

Also consider scalability. You may start small, but the right platform should grow with your business. That includes supporting additional entities, expanding into other finance workflows, and adapting to changes in vendor volume or internal structure.

Lastly, remember that usability matters. The best solution is the one your team will actually use. Look for tools that are intuitive, easy to implement, and able to deliver value quickly.

In the next section, we will help you quantify that value and start building the business case.

AP Automation Discovery Checklist

✓	Question	Why It Matters
	Where are the biggest bottlenecks or delays in our current AP process?	Highlights the areas where automation can deliver the most immediate value.
	How many tools or systems are involved from invoice receipt to payment?	Helps assess how fragmented your current workflow is.
	How easily can we track invoice status, approvals, and payment history?	Identifies visibility gaps that need to be closed.
	Do we manage multiple entities, currencies, or locations?	Determines if the solution needs to support complex or global operations.
	What ERP or accounting systems does AP need to integrate with?	Ensures the platform fits into your existing financial tech stack.
	How important is it to improve cash flow forecasting and working capital visibility?	Aligns the project with broader finance goals.
	Who are the stakeholders we need to involve in this decision?	Clarifies cross-functional needs from IT, procurement, and leadership.
	What are the top three things this solution must absolutely deliver?	Keeps your evaluation focused on strategic impact.

Tip: Use this checklist during internal planning meetings or before engaging vendors to make your evaluation process more efficient and aligned.

Calculating the ROI and TCO of Automation

Automation is not just a cost-saving tactic. It is a long-term investment that can increase operational efficiency, improve financial control, and elevate the strategic value of accounts payable. To build a compelling business case, you need to evaluate both the return on investment and the total cost of ownership.

ROI

ROI captures the measurable impact automation delivers – including time savings, cost reduction, and process improvements.

VS.

TCO

TCO includes everything it takes to implement and maintain the solution over time, such as platform fees, support, training, integrations, and future upgrades.

According to APQC, organizations that automate AP processes can reduce invoice processing costs from a median of $7.75 per invoice down to $2.07 or less. They also report significantly shorter cycle times and fewer late payments.

Payments are a critical part of the equation. According to Ardent Partners, top-performing AP teams are nearly three times more likely to have automated payment processes – and those teams consistently report faster cycle times, stronger supplier relationships, and better visibility into working capital.

Gartner reports that organizations with mature digital finance operations, including AP automation, are 23% more likely to hit their forecast accuracy targets and 33% more likely to make confident financial decisions using real-time data.

ROI vs TCO: Know the Full Value of AP Automation

Once you've found a promising software vendor that you think will fit your needs, you can start having conversations with them to understand their pricing and packaging. You'll use this information to begin charting out the ROI and TCO, in preparation for final cost evaluations and business case proposals.

Hard Cost Savings

These are the measurable financial benefits that result from reducing or eliminating manual processes:

- Lower invoice processing cost
- Reduced labor hours and check-handling expenses
- Fewer late payment penalties
- More early payment discounts captured
- Rebates from virtual card payments

VS.

Soft Cost Benefits

These are operational gains that improve speed, visibility, and confidence in finance operations:

- Shorter approval cycles and faster month-end close
- Real-time visibility into liabilities and cash flow
- Fewer payment errors and supplier disputes
- Improved audit readiness and compliance posture
- More confident financial decision-making

Strategic Considerations

These determine whether the platform can support your long-term goals and growth:

- Will this solution still meet our needs in two years
- Can it grow with our business and integrate with future systems
- Will we need to reimplement if we outgrow it
- Are we investing in a short-term fix or a long-term solution

Key takeaway:

A lower-cost tool may meet today's needs, but an inflexible system often leads to rework, increased spend, and disruption down the line. A scalable platform is a stronger investment that reduces risk and delivers ongoing value.

Tips for Evaluating AP Automation Vendors

Finding the right AP automation partner is more than checking boxes on a feature list. It is about choosing a solution that fits your needs today but also grows with you over time. The right platform should make your team more efficient, more agile, and better equipped to manage financial operations with confidence.

Most evaluations start by comparing features and pricing. But the real value comes from understanding how well the platform supports the full lifecycle of accounts payable – from intake to payment to audit trail – and whether it will still work for you when your business becomes more complex.

Here are a few things to look for:

Go beyond invoice capture

Some tools help digitize invoices and route approvals, but then drop off. If payments, reconciliation, and reporting still require other systems, your process is not really automated. A complete solution connects every step in one place and eliminates the manual work happening behind the scenes.

Prioritize ERP integration

Your ERP is your source of truth. You should be able to pull in vendor records, PO data, and account codes automatically, and sync back approvals, payments, and matched transactions without extra effort.

Understand how matching works

Matching is critical in AP, especially in industries that rely on purchase orders. Ask how the platform handles 2-way, 3-way, or even 4-way matching between POs, invoices, receipts, and contracts. It should be flexible enough to fit your approval process, not force your team to work around it.

Think about controls and compliance

Strong AP processes rely on strong controls. Look for features like approval thresholds, user roles, separation of duties, and audit trails that are built in – not bolted on. You should not need IT support or manual workarounds to stay compliant.

Evaluate payment capabilities

Payments should not be an afterthought. The platform should let you initiate and track payments directly, with support for ACH, enhanced ACH, virtual cards, wires, and checks. Just as important, it should give you control over how payments are approved, timed, and reconciled.

Ask how it scales

Point solutions can be tempting when you are solving one problem. But will it still work when you add new locations, more vendors, or stricter compliance requirements? A scalable platform saves you from costly rework later on.

Smart Questions to Ask Vendors

1. Does the system support the full process from invoice intake to payment and reconciliation?
2. How does it integrate with our ERP and handle PO matching?
3. Can we configure 2-way, 3-way, or 4-way match logic based on invoice type or vendor?
4. How easy is it to manage approvals, rules, and user access without IT?
5. Does it support multiple payment methods in one workflow?
6. Will it scale across multiple entities, currencies, or business units without needing a rebuild?

Why this matters: Accounts payable is not just about speed. It is about accuracy, compliance, and control. The platform you choose should help your team do more with less while making it easier to track spend, enforce policy, and adapt as your business changes.

You are not just automating workflows — you are building a smarter, more resilient financial operation.

AP Automation Vendor Scorecard

Use this scorecard to compare up to three vendors side by side.
Score each category from 1 to 5 (1 = does not meet needs, 5 = fully meets needs).

Category	Vendor A	Vendor B	Vendor C	Notes/Questions
Invoice Capture				Does it support OCR, email, PDF, and portal capture?
PO Matching				Can it handle 2-way, 3-way, and 4-way matching?
Approval Routing				Can rules be configured by amount, department, or vendor?
ERP Integration				Is the integration real-time and bidirectional?
Payment Capabilities				Are ACH, enhanced ACH, virtual cards, wires, and checks supported?
Audit and Compliance				Are controls, audit trails, and role-based access built in?
Reporting and Visibility				Does it provide real-time dashboards and exportable reports?
User Experience				Is it easy for both AP teams and approvers to use?
Document Storage				Can it store contracts, W9s, and vendor documents with audit access?
Supplier Portal				Can vendors view status, upload invoices, and update info?
Implementation Time				What is the expected timeline and onboarding support?
Scalability				Will it grow with our needs without a future rebuild?
Customer References				Do they have success stories from businesses like ours?
Total Cost of Ownership				Does the value outweigh the cost over the long term?

Final Takeaway Questions

Which vendor best supports our full AP process – not just parts of it

Which solution offers long-term value without requiring future replacement

Are we investing in a tool to fix a task or a platform to transform a process

Preparing for a Successful Implementation

You have done the research. You understand what true automation looks like. You have defined your needs, built the business case, and started evaluating vendors. Now it is time to make it real.

The good news is that implementation does not have to be hard. The right partner will guide you through it and set you up for success without overwhelming your team. Whether you are migrating from a manual process or replacing an older system, preparation and alignment make all the difference.

Here is how to get started on the right foot:

Align your stakeholders early

Pull in the right voices from AP, finance, IT, and procurement. Everyone brings a different lens, and having shared visibility from the start keeps the project moving forward. When each team understands the impact, adoption comes faster and results follow.

Set clear goals and success metrics

Before implementation begins, define what success looks like. Are you looking to shorten your invoice cycle time? Reduce errors? Capture more early payment discounts? Make those targets visible so everyone knows what the project is working toward.

Document your current process

Take time to map how things work today – even if it is messy. This helps your implementation team identify quick wins, spot risk areas, and design workflows that reflect your real business needs. You are not just turning on software. You are creating a new way of working.

Start where it matters most

You do not need to automate everything at once. Start with one entity, one region, or one high-volume vendor group. Early wins build momentum and give your team the confidence to expand. A platform approach makes it easy to scale once you are ready.

Keep compliance and visibility top of mind

This is where a platform built for finance really stands out. The ability to track every document, every approval, and every payment in one system helps you stay compliant without adding complexity. The same goes for security. Look for features that protect your process while keeping it simple to manage.

Your Next Step

There is no perfect time to automate. But there is a smart way to do it. Start small. Choose a partner that can grow with you. And build a system that supports your team, not one they have to work around.

You are not just buying technology. You are laying the foundation for a more connected, more resilient financial operation.

What to Do Next

You do not need to automate everything overnight. But you do need to start moving forward.
Here is where to begin:

- **Audit your current process.** Find the friction and where manual work is holding your team back.
- **Align your team.** Bring AP, finance, and IT to the table. Build buy-in early.
- **Define what matters.** Focus on outcomes, not just features. Think about where you want to be in twelve months.
- **Choose your first win.** Start with one area that will deliver fast results and real impact.
- **Find the right partner.** Look for a platform that connects invoice to payment, supports compliance, and grows with you.

You are not just automating AP. You are setting your finance team up for greater control, better visibility, and stronger decision-making.

onPhase

Who is onPhase?

onPhase is an AI-powered financial automation platform that helps organizations manage everything from invoice capture to payment and everything in between.

For over 25 years, onPhase has helped finance teams simplify operations, reduce risk, and improve visibility across their back office. Whether organizations are just starting with basic automation or ready to embrace full end-to-end transformation, onPhase meets them where they are and helps them scale at their own pace.

onPhase is more than just AP automation. It is a trusted platform that supports secure payments, ERP integration, document management, workflow automation, online forms, and audit-ready compliance – all in one system. The platform is built for teams that need flexibility today and scalability for whatever comes next.

Organizations like JetBlue, Cracker Barrel, Sleep Number, Papa Johns, Wounded Warrior Project, and MetroTex Realtors trust onPhase to modernize their financial operations.

From national brands to regional leaders, onPhase is the partner behind more efficient, more confident finance teams.

With a proven track record, a product built for growth, and a partnership-first mindset, onPhase is ready to help organizations move forward one step at a time.

Learn More

onPhase | 13577 Feather Sound Drive, Clearwater, FL 33762 | hello@onphase.com | onphase.com