



Turning Accounts Payable into a Strategic Asset

Trends and Challenges for 2026

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Executive Summary

The accounts payable landscape is undergoing a fundamental transformation as digital payments rapidly overtake traditional legacy methods.

While ACH and corporate cards lead payment growth, many invoices still require manual intervention. This creates inefficiencies that impact supplier satisfaction.

Most organizations have laid down a strong technology foundation, but they are only just beginning to explore the capabilities of AI, advanced fraud prevention, and strategic forecasting.

This report explores the most important trends impacting accounts payable. Featuring insights and suggestions from AP leaders and professionals, readers will gain an insider's view of how this function is transforming from a back-office processing hub into a strategic asset.

About the Respondents

Respondents represent a variety of industries, including:

-  Property Management
-  Golf Courses
-  Hospitality
-  Media
-  Healthcare

The most common organization sizes:

- 37%** 50–300 employees
- 34%** Over 2,000 employees

Annual revenue companies earn:

- 29%** \$200 million to \$2 billion
- 24%** More than \$2 billion

Most respondents occupy roles in:

-  **40%** Accounts Payable
-  **25%** Finance

Seniority:

-  **64%** Directors
-  **31%** Vice Presidents

Key Insights



82%

say suppliers are at least somewhat satisfied with their payment processes.



37%

have faced payment fraud attempts in the last year.



84%

say 10%–25% of invoices require manual intervention.



79%

are somewhat confident in their fraud detection abilities.



57%

have implemented AI in select areas of AP.

The four biggest challenges to AP operations are:

-  Payment errors (53%)
-  Supplier payment disputes (46%)
-  Integration errors (36%)
-  Fraud prevention (36%)

The three biggest priorities for AP improvement are:

-  Accelerating payment cycle times (53%)
-  Improving supplier relationships (44%)
-  Strengthening compliance and controls (42%)



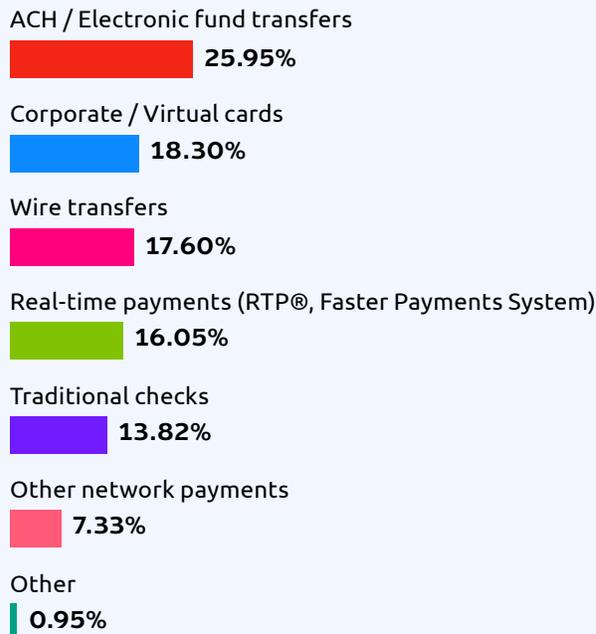
Digital Payments Overtake Legacy Methods as Growth Accelerates

The landscape of supplier payments is shifting away from traditional payment methods toward digital standards and alternatives. This transition reflects not only current payment distribution patterns but also reveals where finance leaders are placing their strategic bets for future growth.

Today, Automated Clearing House (ACH) payments and electronic funds transfers lead the way, accounting for an average of 25.95% of supplier payments. Corporate or virtual cards follow at 18.3%, while wire transfers make up 17.6% of payment activity.

Looking ahead, the growth priorities tell an interesting story.

How often does your company make payments to suppliers using each of the following payment methods?



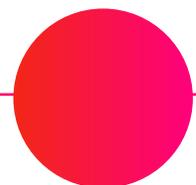
Supplier Payment Methods Are Similar Across Industries—For Now

Currently, there is little variance in supplier payment methods across the industries represented in the study. For example, all of the industries use ACH or electronic fund transfers to pay suppliers 25.25% to 26.75% of the time on average. Similarly, each industry use real-time payments 15% to 17% of the time on average.

The only payment types with significant variance between industries are corporate (or virtual) cards and other network payments.

Specifically, healthcare companies use corporate or virtual cards 15.75% of the time on average, whereas golf courses and private clubs use them 20.75%

on average. Meanwhile, golf courses and private clubs use other network payments only 5.25% of the time on average, while property management firms use them 9.75% on average.



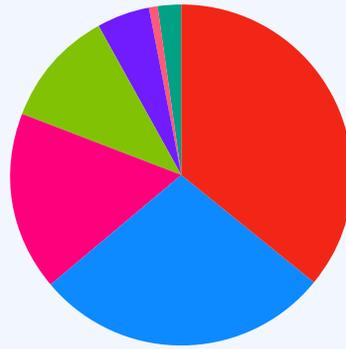
Turning Accounts Payable into a Strategic Asset

When asked which payment method will see the greatest expansion over the next 12 months, 36% of respondents point to ACH and electronic funds transfers, and 28% say they plan to focus on corporate or virtual cards.

In sharp contrast, wire transfers garner only 5% of the respondents, and only 1% say traditional checks will see the greatest growth. This suggests that companies are attempting to move past these payment methods due to their higher costs and lack of efficiency.

Newer payment methods offered by financial technology companies, as well as innovative blockchain payments, may become more prevalent in the future. However, organizations continue to value ACH payments for their cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and security.

Which of the following payment methods do you expect will experience the greatest growth in your company over the next 12 months?



- 36% ACH/Electronic fund transfers
- 28% Corporate/Virtual cards
- 17% Other network payments
- 11% Real-time payments (RTP®, Faster Payments System)
- 5% Wire transfers
- 1% Traditional checks
- 2% None: They will stay about the same.

Supplier Payment Methods Are Similar Across Industries—For Now

There are more significant differences in how industries expect their payment methods to change over the next 12 months, however.

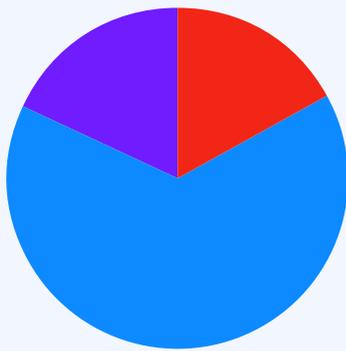
A significant percentage of golf courses and private clubs (45%) and

about half of healthcare organizations (50%) expect to see the most growth in ACH and electronic fund transfers over the next 12 months. A significant share of hospitality organizations (40%) expect to see the most growth in corporate and virtual card payments to

suppliers. No significant percentage of the industry respondents expect to see the most growth in wire transfers or real-time payments.

Manual Processes Hinder Supplier Satisfaction Despite Overall Positivity

How satisfied are your suppliers with your current payment processes and timing?



- **17%** Very satisfied: They provide positive feedback and have minimal complaints.
- **65%** Somewhat satisfied: They experience occasional issues, but they are generally satisfied.
- **18%** Mixed satisfaction: They have indicated there is significant room for improvement.
- **0%** Not satisfied: They experience frequent payment issues and have frequent complaints.
- **0%** I'm not sure.

What percentage of your invoices currently require manual intervention or exception handling?



- **6%** 1% – 10%
- **84%** 10% – 25%
- **10%** 26% – 50%

While most organizations receive favorable feedback on their payment operations, a closer examination reveals underlying challenges that threaten these relationships. The persistence of manual interventions in invoice processing creates friction that can erode supplier satisfaction over time, even when overall sentiment remains positive.

Specifically, 65% indicate their suppliers are satisfied, and 17% report that their suppliers are very satisfied with current payment processes and timing.

However, 18% acknowledge their suppliers have flagged significant room for improvement.

This deserves closer attention. Unhappy suppliers may move business elsewhere or demand less favorable terms. In competitive markets, supplier relationships represent a strategic asset, and payment experience directly impacts those partnerships.

The respondents also indicate that there is a hidden operational burden across industries: manual processes. These may be causing at least some friction in the respondents' supplier relationships.

Organizations have long sought to reduce manual interventions in the accounts payable process. Despite some success, a substantial 84% of respondents report that 10% to 25% of their invoices require manual intervention or exception handling.

Another 10% face even greater challenges, with 25% to 50% of invoices needing manual touchpoints.

These findings highlight that there is a substantial distance between an organization's aspirations for automation in accounts payable and the reality of its day-to-day operations. Even organizations that have invested in AP technology still wrestle with exceptions that pull staff away from strategic work.

The volume of manual intervention suggests that invoice quality issues, matching problems, or system limitations remain common. These issues can create inefficiencies that ripple through the entire payment cycle, impacting suppliers as well.

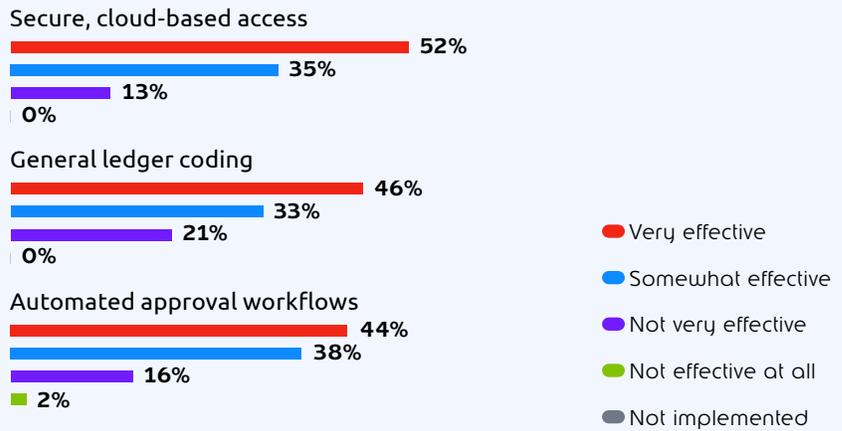
AI Remains Limited Despite a Strong AP Technology Foundation

Organizations have successfully implemented core accounts payable technologies and express high satisfaction with these foundational tools. However, artificial intelligence adoption remains in early stages across the industry.

Secure, cloud-based access leads the effectiveness rankings at 52%, followed by general ledger coding at 46% and automated approval workflows at 44%.

The AI adoption landscape reveals an industry in active transition. At 57%, a majority of respondents report they have implemented AI in select areas of their AP department and are currently expanding those capabilities.

How would you rate the current effectiveness of your company's technology in the following areas?



“Artificial intelligence-based fraud detection software will improve security by monitoring transactional patterns and automatically flagging suspicious activity.”

Finance Director, Golf Course or Private Club



Turning Accounts Payable into a Strategic Asset

Only 5% have achieved full AI implementation across multiple AP processes, while most remaining organizations are still in earlier stages: 29% are piloting solutions, 8% are in the planning phase, and 1% are evaluating options.

The gap between basic automation satisfaction and AI maturity suggests a critical insight: organizations have largely mastered yesterday's technology but are still learning to harness tomorrow's.

This measured approach makes strategic sense given the complexity of AI integration and the learning curve involved. However, with only 5% reaching full implementation, even leading organizations have significant runway ahead.

What best describes your AP department's current use of AI-powered tools?

We have fully implemented AI across multiple AP processes.

5%

We have implemented AI in select areas and are expanding.

57%

We are currently piloting AI solutions.

29%

We are planning to implement AI within the next 12 months.

8%

We are evaluating AI, but have no immediate implementation plans.

1%

We have no current plans for AI adoption.

0%

I'm not sure about our AI strategy.

0%

Property Management and Healthcare Industries Show the Highest Rates of AI Adoption

When the results from different industries in the study are compared, there are significant differences in their rates of AI adoption. The two industries with the highest rates of adoption are property management and healthcare. The industry with the lowest rate of adoption is, arguably, golf courses and private clubs.

Specifically, 85% of property management firms and 75% of healthcare organizations have at least implemented AI in select areas. That's compared to only 35% of golf courses and private clubs.

The high adoption rates in these industries are likely due to necessity and opportunity.

Property management firms may have both B2B and consumer clients, with a significant portion of their operations facing clients in the form of portals, interactive websites, and help centers. AI-powered tools can enable clients to engage in self-service, research, and payments more effectively, and they can be used in the back office to automate complex and time-consuming AP activities.

Healthcare organizations have demonstrated that they have significant opportunities to improve efficiency with AI. Many have already adopted

AI-powered training and patient education tools, and back-office AI solutions can make AP operations at hospitals and health systems much more efficient.

Golf courses and private clubs have opportunities to use AI for similar purposes, but the need may not be as pressing. Organizations in this sector tend to serve select clientele and are often more dependent upon human relationships. Some may even find their legacy systems sufficient for their AP processes, at least for the time being.

Fraud Risk Remains High as Threats Grow in Sophistication

The accounts payable function has become a prime target for increasingly sophisticated fraud schemes. Most of its vulnerabilities stem from the evolving nature of fraud tactics, which continue to outpace traditional defense mechanisms and demand more advanced, proactive strategies.

More than one-third (37%) of the respondents report that they've experienced attempted or successful fraud in the past year. This means more than one in three organizations has been targeted, underscoring the pervasive nature of the risk.



Hospitality and Property Management Organizations Suffer the Highest Rates of Fraud

Industry-specific data from the report shows that 60% of the respondents from the hospitality industry experienced payment fraud in the past 12 months. Almost half of property management respondents (45%) also experienced payment fraud.

The industries that experienced the least are golf courses and private clubs (20%) and media agencies (25%).

Respondents Share Their Fraud Experiences

When asked to describe what they've seen, the respondents report a diverse array of payment fraud incidents targeting accounts payable operations. These ranged from vendor email compromises to sophisticated coordinated attacks.

Email and Invoice Manipulation

Email and invoice manipulation was one of the most prevalent threats. Multiple organizations experienced vendor email account breaches where fraudsters altered banking details on legitimate invoices.

As one respondent explains, "An email of a legitimate vendor was hacked into, enabling fraudsters to alter bank details on invoices." Similar incidents involved content vendors and pharmaceutical

suppliers, with compromised accounts used to send fake invoices with modified banking information.

Business Email Compromise and Impersonation

Tactics involving compromised or impersonated email addresses were also common. Fraudsters impersonated suppliers, vendors, and even tenants to redirect payments.

"We had an instance where a fraudster impersonated a supplier of medical equipment and supplied fake bank credentials," one respondent from a healthcare organization reports.

Another faced refund fraud where "a coordinated group of individuals made fake refund requests for bookings that never existed under stolen guest IDs."

Data Breaches and Compromised Systems

Data leaks and breached systems resulted in severe consequences for several respondents. Organizations suffered cyberattacks that leaked sensitive banking information, enabling unauthorized payments and withdrawals.

One respondent described a serious attack: "We were hit by an attack on our booking website, which led to the theft of more than 100 customers' credit card information."

Internal Fraud

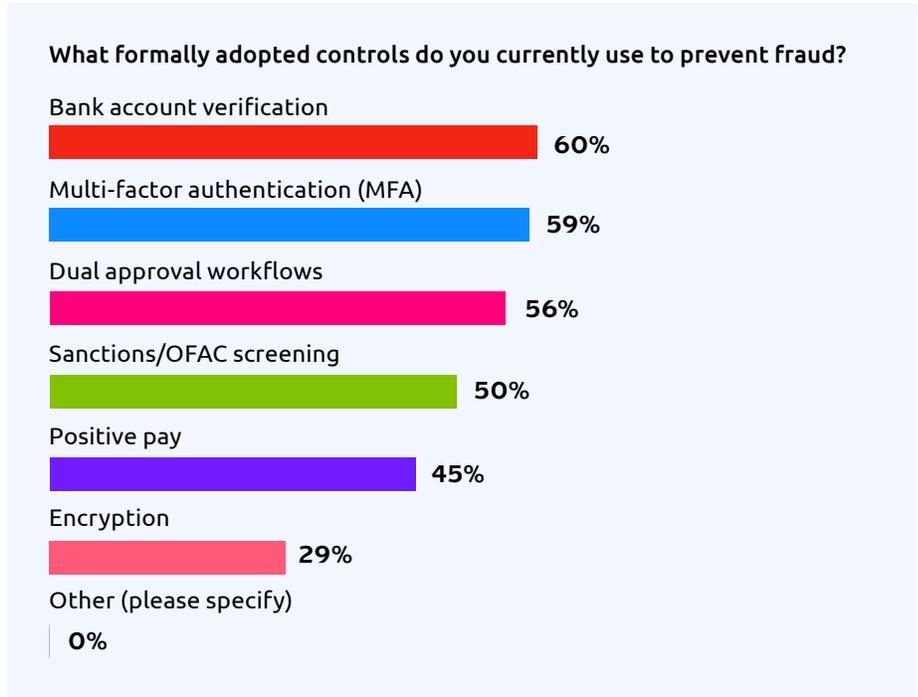
Finally, insider threats also surfaced in the responses. In one instance, property managers siphoned rent payments and embezzled them. In another, insiders conspired with third parties to process fraudulent refunds to controlled accounts.

MFA and Bank Account Verification Become More Common

Organizations have responded by implementing new layers of defense, as well as more sophisticated fraud prevention measures.

Bank account verification leads their adoption efforts at 60%. This is followed closely by multi-factor authentication (MFA) at 59% and dual approval workflows at 56%.

MFA has become a standard additional verification method across industries and is often used in conjunction with other login information, such as passwords. Bank account verification is useful for ensuring payments and transfers are going to the intended recipients.

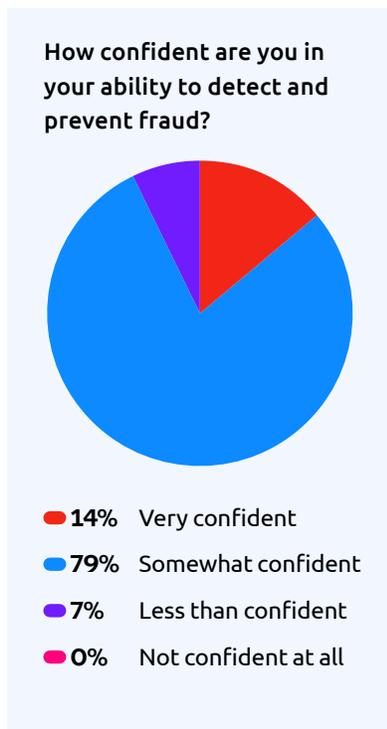


Organizations Lack Strong Confidence in Their Defenses

Despite deploying these controls, confidence levels reveal a troubling trend.

Specifically, 79% of respondents are only somewhat confident in their ability to detect and prevent fraud, while another 7% of them express even less confidence.

This means 86% of organizations lack strong confidence in their fraud defenses, even after investing in verification tools and approval processes. This confidence gap suggests that traditional controls may not be keeping pace with increasingly sophisticated fraud tactics.



Golf Courses and Private Clubs Have the Least Confidence in Their Fraud Prevention Abilities

Although most respondents across industries are “somewhat confident” in their ability to detect and prevent fraud, respondents representing golf courses and private clubs show the least amount of confidence. Specifically, 25% of these respondents say they are “less than confident,” while only 65% say they are “somewhat confident.”

Arguably, the industry with the highest level of confidence in preventing fraud is healthcare: 20% of these respondents are “very confident,” while 80% are somewhat confident. This may be due to increasing investments in fraud prevention, as this industry has long been a primary target for fraudsters.

Additional Fraud Prevention Measures Planned by Accounts Payable Professionals

To address this issue, accounts payable leaders are planning to implement additional layers of defense. Conversations with the respondents reveal that most are prioritizing technology-driven solutions and organizational improvements as a strategy.

Technology and Automation

Many respondents are implementing advanced monitoring systems. One professional says, "We will invest in more proactive monitoring tools that can anticipate threats before they become incidents."

AI and machine learning also feature prominently in responses, with many respondents discussing plans for behavioral analytics, predictive fraud modeling, and automated anomaly

detection. As one respondent explains, "One of our biggest priorities is implementing AI-driven monitoring tools that can spot transactional anomalies as they happen."

Authentication and Verification

In addition to MFA and bank account verification, biometric authentication and other enhanced identity verification methods are key priorities.

Multiple organizations plan to implement stricter Know Your Customer (KYC) and Anti-Money Laundering (AML) checks, as well as geolocation-based verification.

"We are thinking of rolling out a compulsory two-factor authentication system for every user login and account," says a respondent.

Organizational and Process Improvements

Respondents say they are also planning to strengthen internal controls through segregation of duties, enhanced employee training, and improved vendor oversight. Several mentioned establishing dedicated fraud risk committees and internal analytics teams.

Collaboration and Integration

Finally, some organizations are seeking to unify their fraud detection tools both internally and with partners. This will improve their cross-functional and cross-industry collaboration on anti-fraud strategies.

One respondent notes that their organization is "piloting a fraud orchestration layer to unify detection tools across all business units."



"I think we will see AP collaborate more closely with procurement and finance, especially as we tighten compliance and audit controls in light of growing regulatory scrutiny."

Vice President of Finance, Property Management Organization



Integration and Resource Barriers Stall AP Automation Ambitions

Despite clear priorities and well-identified goals, accounts payable departments face significant obstacles that prevent them from achieving their automation objectives.

When identifying the single biggest barrier to achieving AP automation goals, respondents pointed to integration with existing systems (29%), lack of internal expertise or resources (23%), and limited budget or other priorities taking precedence (22%).

The day-to-day operational challenges paint a broader picture. Payment errors and reconciliation issues top the list at 53%, followed by supplier payment disputes at 46%.

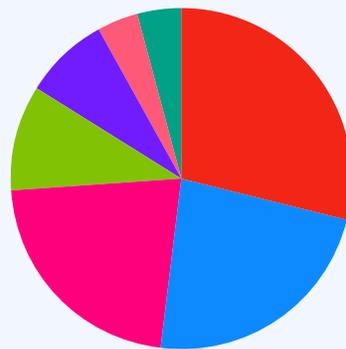
Integration issues with existing systems and fraud prevention and detection both register at 36%, revealing multiple pressure points across the AP function.



“Reducing charge-back fraud is a big priority, so we are planning to integrate a third party identity verification step for higher risk transactions.”

Director & Controller, Property Management Organization

Which of the following is the single biggest barrier preventing your company from achieving its AP automation goals?



- 29% Integration challenges with existing systems
- 23% Lack of internal expertise or resources
- 22% Limited budget or other priorities taking precedence
- 10% Resistance to change from staff or leadership
- 8% Unclear ROI or business case
- 4% Vendor/supplier readiness issues
- 4% Compliance and security concerns
- 0% Other

Which of the following are the three (3) biggest challenges currently impacting your AP operations?

Payment errors and reconciliation issues
53%

Supplier payment disputes
46%

Fraud prevention and detection
36%

Integration issues with existing systems
36%

Lack of real-time visibility into cash flow
30%

Invoice approval delays
27%

Compliance with changing regulations
25%

Staff retention and training
24%

Manual data entry and processing
13%

Managing remote/hybrid work processes
10%

Other (please specify)
0%

Turning Accounts Payable into a Strategic Asset

Looking ahead, organizations have clear improvement priorities. Accelerating invoice-to-payment cycle times leads at 53%, with improving supplier experience and relationships close behind at 44%. Strengthening compliance and controls rounds out the top three at 42%.

Notably, integration challenges are cited as both the top automation barrier and a major operational challenge. This reveals a critical bottleneck that affects the entire AP function.

When systems don't communicate effectively, organizations face slower cycle times, more manual work, and greater error rates. These are all problems that directly undermine their stated priorities.

Equally noteworthy is the alignment between current pain points and future priorities.

Organizations struggling with payment errors and supplier disputes are logically prioritizing faster cycle times and better supplier relationships. This suggests leaders understand their challenges and have identified the right improvement targets, but lack the tools, resources, or system compatibility needed to execute on those goals.

What are your top three (3) priorities for AP improvement over the next 12 months?

Accelerating invoice-to-payment cycle times **53%**

Improving supplier experience and relationships **44%**

Strengthening compliance and controls **42%**

Gaining better visibility into cash flow **35%**

Integrating AI and machine learning capabilities **32%**

Enhancing fraud prevention and security **31%**

Reducing processing costs **23%**

Implementing or expanding automation **20%**

Improving data accuracy and reporting **17%**

Enhancing remote work capabilities **3%**

Conclusion: How Accounts Payable Will Become a Strategic Asset

Accounts payable professionals anticipate a fundamental transformation over the next two years, shifting from transactional processing to strategic financial management. This evolution is driven by automation, data analytics, and expanding responsibilities in risk management and vendor relationships.

From Transactional to Strategic

The most prominent theme is the shift away from manual processing toward strategic functions. One respondent says, "Accounts Payable will move from being a purely operational function to a more strategic one."

Another emphasizes, "In two years, I think accounts payable will be more about data management than invoice processing."

This strategic evolution encompasses cash flow forecasting, vendor relationship management, and financial planning. The function will "shift from transactional work to more strategic cash flow management," one respondent notes.

Automation and Touchless Processing

Automation will fundamentally reshape daily operations.

One respondent explains, "We expect accounts payable to become far more automated with less manual invoice processing and more straight-through workflows."

Multiple professionals highlight touchless invoice processing as inevitable, with one stating, "The trend toward touchless processing of invoices will bring manual intervention down to almost zero." This automation will enable teams to focus on exceptions rather than routine tasks.

Enhanced Governance and Risk Management

As we have learned, leaders are planning to implement additional layers of defense for their payment processes in the coming years. As such, accounts payable is expanding into compliance and fraud prevention.

One respondent observes, "Realistically, compliance and fraud prevention are now becoming such a big part of the process that AP is almost a risk function now." This includes tighter controls, audit trails, and proactive fraud detection using AI tools.

Data-Driven Decision Making

Finally, real-time visibility and analytics will become central capabilities for accounts payable.

One professional says, "The most significant change will likely be how we use accounts payable data to forecast future spend." Teams will evolve into data-driven units that support forecasting, spend analysis, and strategic vendor management.

The function will then be able to lend itself as an asset in strategic planning, business continuity discussions, and high-level cost-savings decisions.



Multiple professionals highlight touchless invoice processing as inevitable, with one stating, "The trend toward touchless processing of invoices will bring manual intervention down to almost zero." This automation will enable teams to focus on exceptions rather than routine tasks.

Key Suggestions



Prioritize integration of payment systems with existing enterprise technology infrastructure:

Integration with existing systems represents the top barrier to automation and the acceleration of payment cycles.



Accelerate strategic AI implementation beyond pilot programs to achieve greater efficiency and strategic value:

Most organizations remain in early AI adoption stages and lack confidence in fraud detection, positioning early adopters in a leadership position.



Deploy multi-layered fraud prevention combining bank account verification, MFA, and AI-driven behavioral analytics:

As fraud attempts are only expected to increase in volume, organizations must move beyond traditional controls. Instead, they need sophisticated, technology-driven detection systems that anticipate threats before incidents occur.



Invest in reducing manual invoice intervention to improve supplier relationships:

Most invoices still include manual touchpoints, creating a friction point in supplier relationships.



The most prominent theme is the shift away from manual processing toward strategic functions. One respondent says, "Accounts Payable will move from being a purely operational function to a more strategic one."



About the Author



Edenred Pay, an Edenred Company, is a leader in invoice-to-pay automation and has extensive experience in the property management industry. Our integrated platform automates, optimizes, and monetizes the entire invoice-to-pay cycle, from invoice receipt through payment reconciliation. And we connect buyers with suppliers, ERPs, banks, Fintechs, and payment rails to improve efficiency, enhance visibility, mitigate the risk of payment fraud, and deliver value to the enterprise.

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