

SSON'S ESSENTIALS GUIDE TO

BREAKING THE KPI CEILING: HOW AI IS REDEFINING AP PRODUCTIVITY

**Why agentic AI is the missing link between
automation and outcomes**

The Current Glass Ceiling of AP Automation

Why Old Automation No Longer Meets Today's Demands

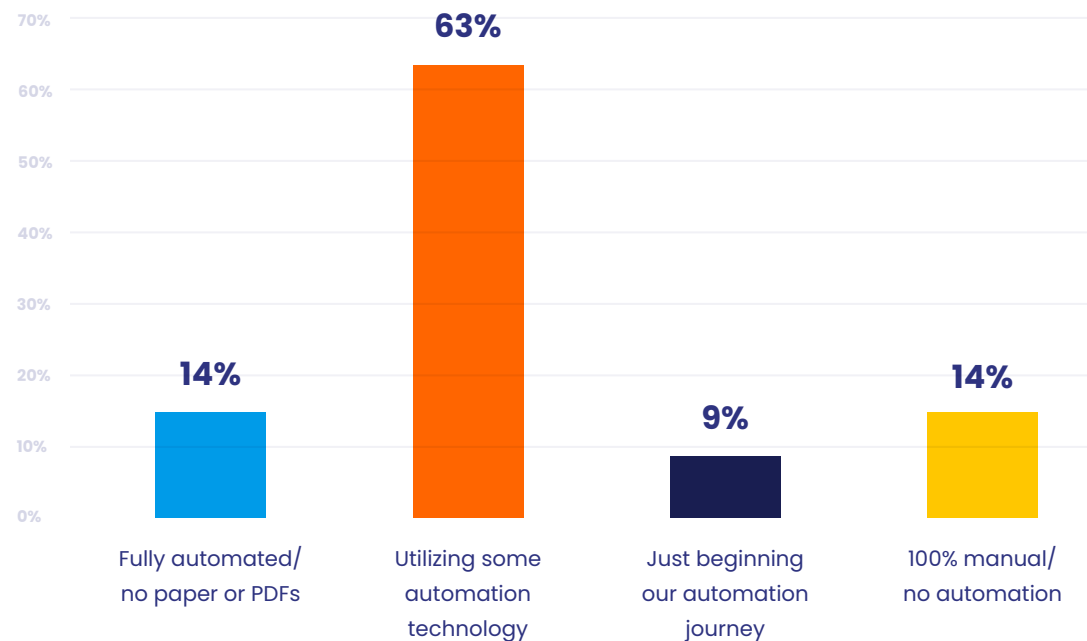
In recent years, finance leaders have seen a surge in Accounts Payable (AP) automation, with 63% of AP teams having automated in some capacity. Despite automation levels soaring, however, KPIs such as straight-through-processing (STP) have stalled.

Data collected at SSON's AP Automation Summit revealed that 76% of teams report that their Procure to Pay (P2P) process is less than 50% automated, with just 3% achieving automation levels of over 70%. This highlights that AP leaders are finding it increasingly difficult to reach that "last mile" to touchless processing. As AP is an integral part of every organization, this glass ceiling is a cause for concern.

A mediocre AP process clearly has an impact on the process leader meeting their own KPIs, such as cost per invoice and processing time. However, it also impacts the ability of a Global Business Service (GBS) to meet its broader KPIs, such as annual cost savings, SLA adherence, and scalability.

FIGURE 1

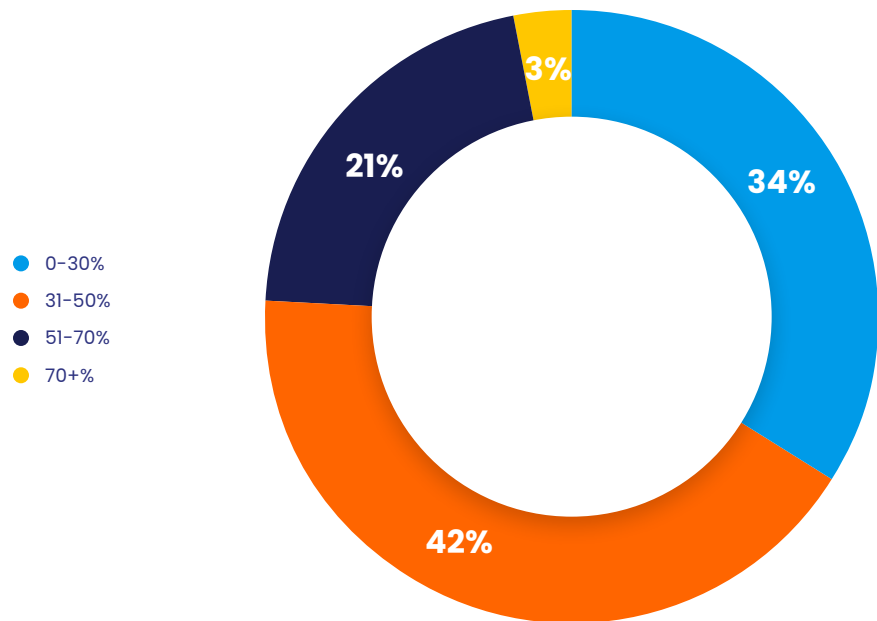
Where is your organization at on your automation journey?



Source: AP Automation Virtual Summit, March 2025

FIGURE 2

What is the processing automation (e.g. touchless invoice handling) level in your P2P procedures?



Source: AP Automation Virtual Summit, March 2025

But what is causing this automation ceiling?

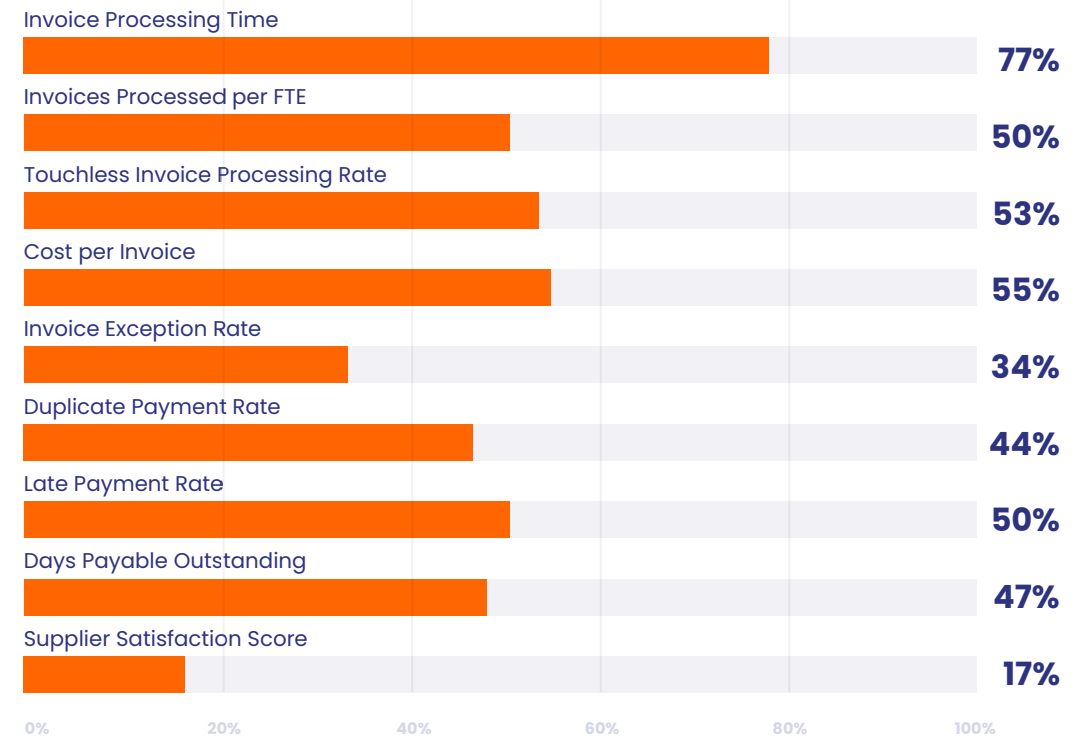
In 2025, poor invoice data quality, inefficient processes, and legacy ERP systems have accelerated challenges alongside the rise in tax and e-invoicing regulations. The biggest hurdle, however, is exceptions such as mismatched POs, Goods Receipt Notes (GRNs), non-PO invoices, and irregular invoice formats, which often require manual intervention. Traditional AP automation solutions, such as Robotic Process Automation (RPA), whilst great at automating standard templates and structured data, lack the intelligence to deal with exceptions. This is not the case with AI.

What Factors are Impacting Your AP KPIs?

As the graph to the right suggests, there are a multitude of KPIs used by AP teams today, the most popular being invoice processing time. Whilst invoice processing is usually relatively simple, processing time grows rapidly when teams have to deal with invoice exceptions such as invalid POs, duplicates, or price and quantity mismatches. Although this might occur in only 20% of invoices, the time spent manually correcting, checking, and processing exceptions far outweighs its relatively low number, having a significant impact on adherence to KPIs such as cost-per-invoice, processing time, and touchless-invoice rate.

FIGURE 3

What are the most important metrics to track within AP

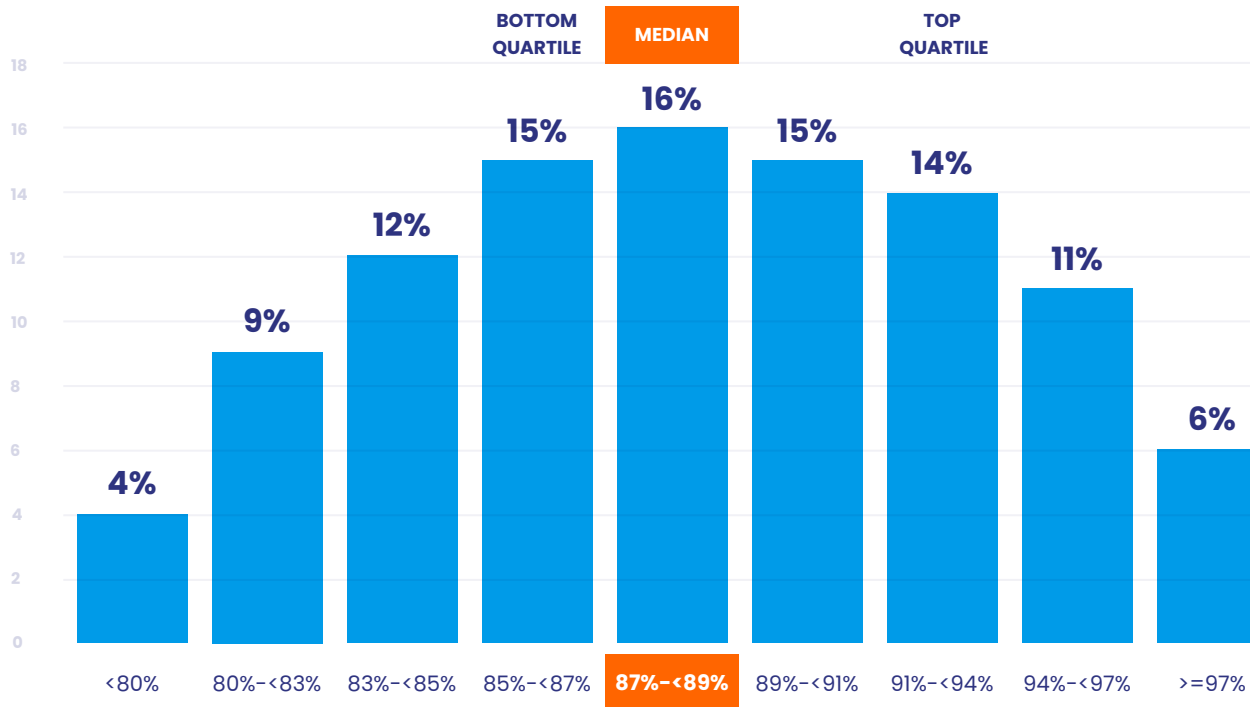


Source: AP Automation Virtual Summit, March 2025

Accuracy Levels are Plateauing

FIGURE 4

AP Invoice Processing Accuracy



Source: SSON Research & Analytics' Metric Benchmark

As the accuracy of AP processing is limited by the technology used, progress has unsurprisingly plateaued with traditional automation. SSON Research & Analytics' Metric Benchmark reflects this ceiling, as AP invoicing accuracy rates tend to cluster around the median range of 87%–89%, with just 6% achieving accuracy levels of 97% or higher. Like with invoice processing time, this is down to RPA's inability to handle exceptions.

AI, meanwhile, breaks through the traditional automation plateau by handling complexity, variability, and decision-making that RPA cannot. In short, AI:

- ✓ **Processes unstructured data (PDFs, emails, images) with high accuracy.**
- ✓ **Learns from historical patterns to continuously improve performance.**
- ✓ **Applies reasoning to exceptions, reducing manual intervention.**
- ✓ **Understanding nuances allows for accuracy rates beyond RPA's ceiling.**

Compliance is Taking Priority Over Efficiency

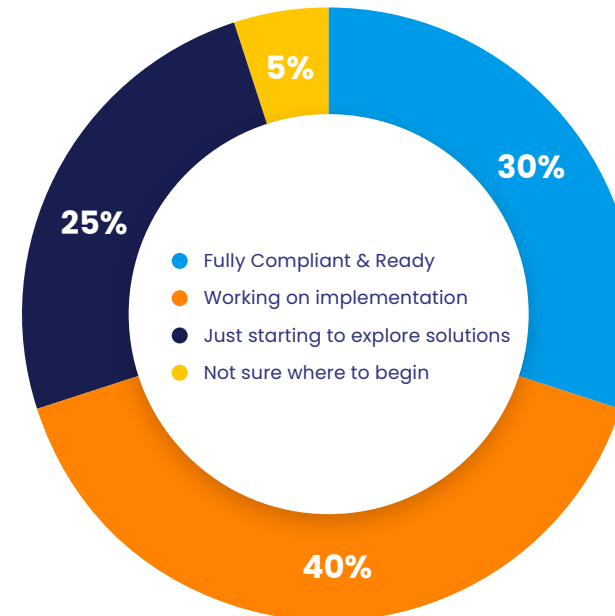
A further obstacle to meeting KPIs within both AP and GBS is the increasingly complicated regulatory landscape. Aside from country-specific e-invoicing regulations, AP leaders must grapple with cross-border tax and digital reporting requirements, standards such as Peppol, fraud prevention initiatives, and even new ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) regulations. Whilst three-quarters of organizations are already receiving e-invoices, nearly a quarter of organizations admit they do not know where to begin with e-invoicing mandates.

This lack of both direction and clarity impacts AP teams' ability to meet their KPIs, as it impacts processing time, touchless processing rates, and thus cost-per-invoice. AI solutions can provide some much-needed support and peace of mind by adapting quickly to shifting regulations and reducing risk exposure.

- ✓ **Automates adherence to evolving e-invoicing mandates across regions.**
- ✓ **Validates and standardizes invoice data to meet jurisdictional requirements.**
- ✓ **Flags anomalies and potential non-compliance in real time.**
- ✓ **Reduces dependency on manual monitoring of regulatory changes.**

FIGURE 5

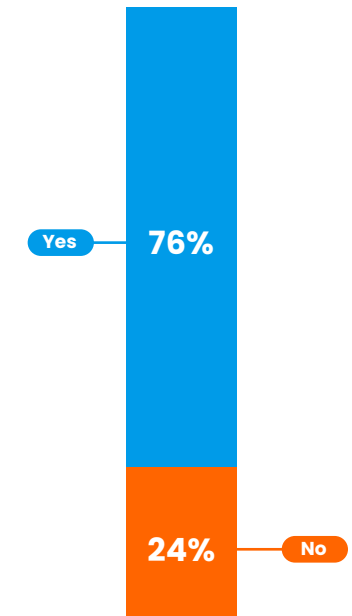
How prepared is your organization for upcoming e-invoicing mandates?



Source: Data collected by SSON Digital, Q2 2025

FIGURE 6

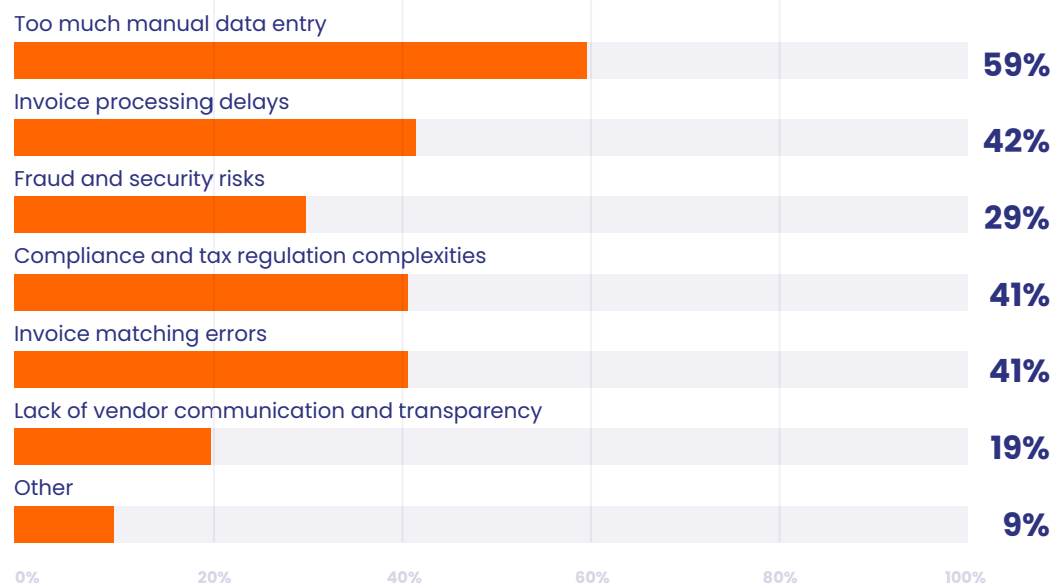
Are you receiving electronic invoices today?



Trouble on the Horizon: Government Gateways vs STP

FIGURE 7

What are your biggest AP challenges?



Source: AP Automation Virtual Summit, March 2025

Manual data entry (59%), invoice delays (42%), compliance complexities (41%), and matching errors (41%) are the top challenges cited by AP professionals, underscoring the urgent need for both STP and regulatory alignment.

But ironically, as governments enforce stricter VAT and e-invoicing mandates, compliance is beginning to disrupt STP. As data is increasingly mapped to government gateways rather than buyer ERPs, inconsistent formatting and exceptions will surge. For lean AP teams, this shift threatens to turn automation from a solution into a strain.

AI can bridge the gap between STP and government gateways by standardizing data and managing exceptions at scale:

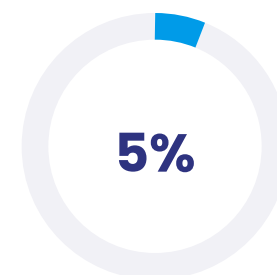
- ✓ Harmonizes inconsistent formats across government platforms and ERPs.
- ✓ Automates exception handling to prevent bottlenecks in invoice flow.
- ✓ Ensures VAT and e-invoicing compliance without sacrificing STP goals.
- ✓ Reduces strain on lean AP teams by minimizing manual intervention.

The New Limits of AI-Enabled AP

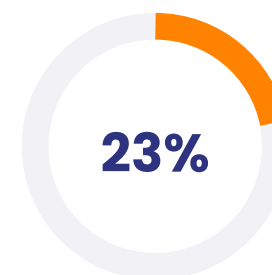
In response to the restrictions of traditional automation, AI emerges as a necessary evolution capable of reasoning through exceptions, managing unstructured data, and continuously monitoring to ensure compliance. This enables AP teams to reach higher automation levels, even in fragmented and fast-evolving environments. SSON data collected in March reveals that many AP departments have begun their journey with AI, with 28% of organizations currently implementing or already using AI.

FIGURE 8

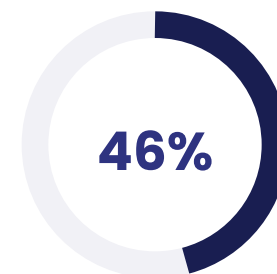
What is the level of AI adoption in your P2P procedures?



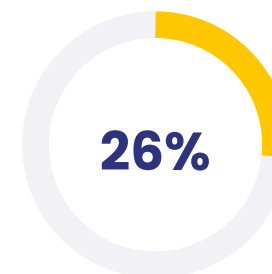
AI utilization is fully adopted



AI implementation in progress



Part of the P2P digital roadmap, but not yet implemented



Not yet planned

Source: AP Automation Virtual Summit, March 2025

Still more recent data, on Agentic AI, found that nearly 30% of organizations have already applied Agentic AI to the P2P process, emphasizing that AP is a prime testing ground for autonomous agents.

FIGURE 9

What Are The Specific Work-Processes In Which Agentic AI Has Been Applied To Date In Your Organization?



Source: AP Automation Virtual Summit, March 2025

Quantifying the Uplift of AI-Enabled AP

With AI-enabled AP, organizations are breaking through the KPI ceiling. As organizations adopt AI-enabled AP tools, like Springtime Technologies' Invoicetrack, they are already achieving measurable results such as:

>90% Touchless Processing Rate

>95% Invoice First-Time Match Rate

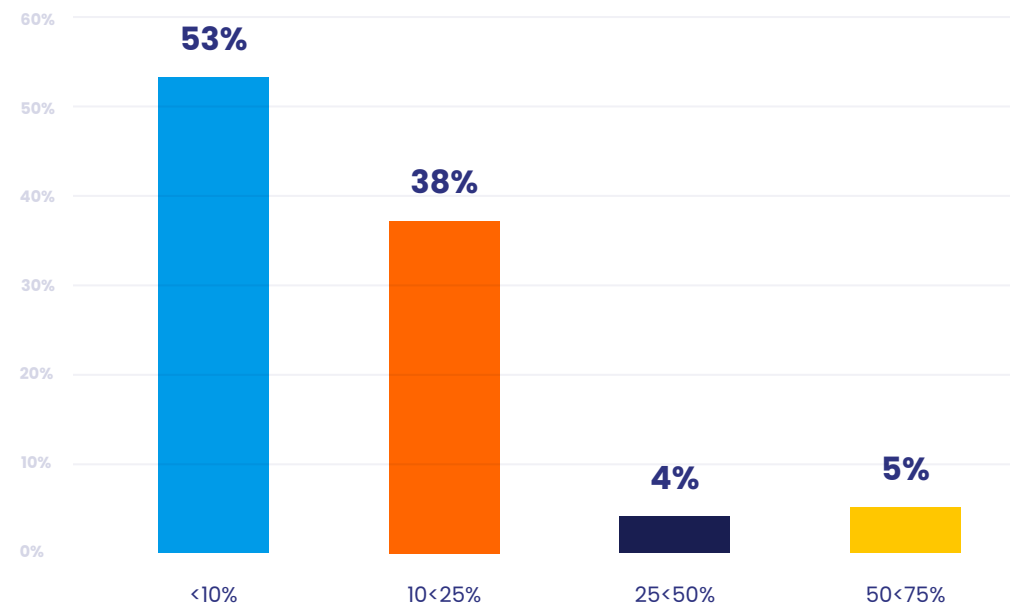
50–60% Reduction in invoice costs

Broader adoption of Agentic AI has led to 38% of organizations reporting productivity improvements of 10–25%, while 53% have seen gains of up to 10%.

These figures highlight the tangible impact of AI on operational efficiency, accuracy, and cost control, especially in fragmented, exception-heavy environments where traditional automation struggles.

FIGURE 10

How Much Confirmed Productivity Improvement Has Agentic AI Delivered In Implementations You Have Made?



Source: AP Automation Virtual Summit, March 2025

Practicality Guide: 5 Ways to Implement a KPI-Led AP Automation Strategy

1

Relate your AI and agentic strategy to business outcomes.

There must be alignment with KPIs that drive business goals.

2

Measure the impact of automation, AI, and agents at each phase of their implementation. Utilize robust reporting and analytics platforms to provide clear visibility, driving further efficiency and effectiveness while reporting on the impact on performance.

3

Prioritize AI and agents to drive STP and touchless processing and management of complex exceptions. This will have the most significant impact on strategic AP KPIs.

4

Headcount is the single biggest cost in GBS. Use evolving AI automation to drive headcount reductions, but also plan for new roles in your AP organisation. As you move towards the use of AI agents, AP roles and skills will be focused on oversight and governance rather than on transactional processes.

5

Implement process analytics that enable GPOs to drive end-to-end AP process orchestration and to apply agents strategically to deliver greater efficiencies and cost savings.

Contributing to Broader GBS Goals: AI for Reporting & Analytics

The journey to achieving 100% touchless invoice processing requires visibility, transparency, and intelligent navigation. Although AP teams have begun using analytics to measure historical patterns, there is still a way to go before real-time analytics is widespread.

Agentic AI is redefining AP reporting by transforming traditional dashboards into intelligent, proactive decision-making tools. This helps AP teams not only in meeting their own KPIs but in contributing to the goals of their GBS and reinforcing their value beyond cost-savings and efficiency gains. Insight that helps GBS leaders accurately calculate cost and capacity is incredibly valuable and is the difference between a finance team that crunches numbers and one that acts as an engine to the GBS and therefore the wider organization.

Key capabilities include:



Smart AP dashboards:

Identify invoice trends, payment anomalies, and compliance risks in real time.



Intelligent drill-downs:

Pinpoint root causes of KPI shifts like late payments or exception rates.



Advanced what-if modelling:

Simulate AP scenarios to guide cash flow decisions and process improvements.

The Future of AP is Autonomous

AP automation via a traditional, rules-based approach has reached its limits, and the demands of compliance, complexity, and scale require a new approach. AI offers a breakthrough: enabling smarter processing, proactive reporting, and resilient compliance across fragmented systems.

By embracing autonomous agents and AI-enabled AP, organizations can unlock further measurable gains in efficiency, accuracy, and visibility. However, agentic AI not only impacts the critical KPIs within AP but also contributes to GBS leaders meeting their KPIs of cost-saving, revenue creation, and customer experience.

Top Takeaways for Finance Leaders



Traditional automation has plateaued:

RPA alone can't handle the complexity and variability of modern AP.



Agentic AI breaks the KPI ceiling:

Agentic AI redefines performance boundaries, surpassing traditional AP automation by breaking the KPI ceiling with higher STP rates, reduced exception volumes, and enhanced compliance.



Compliance is now a top priority:

AI helps navigate evolving mandates and reduces regulatory risk.



Autonomous agents transform reporting:

Shifting from reactive dashboards to proactive, insight-driven analytics.

The tools are ready. The value is proven. The time to act is now.

“Most organisations are on an AI journey, but they are at different stages. But Agentic AI will take you beyond what you can achieve with pure AI-proven automation towards 90% touchless processing. That will have a significant impact on efficiency and accelerate scalability”.

Markus Hübl, CEO, Springtime Technologies



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The **Shared Services & Outsourcing Network** (SSON) is the largest and most established community of shared services and outsourcing professionals in the world, with over 220,000 members. Established in 1999, SSON recognized the revolution in support services as it was happening and realized that a forum was needed through which practitioners could connect with each other on a regional and global basis. SSON is a one-stop shop for shared services professionals, offering industry-leading events, training, reports, surveys, interviews, white papers, videos, editorial, infographics, podcasts and more.

Headquartered in Vienna, Austria, Springtime Technologies is dedicated to revolutionising Accounts Payable (AP) processes by pushing the boundaries of AI-enabled automation.

Our mission is to empower finance teams with intelligent and easy-to-use solutions to simplify complex Procure-to-Pay (P2P) processes. Our flagship product, Invoicetrack, has been developed with an AI-first approach. It embraces the power of touchless technology that learns, adapts, and evolves to reduce human intervention and effort and enable superior efficiency.

Focused on simplifying high-volume, multi-entity and multi-currency invoice processing across global markets, our next-level automation allows AP managers, process owners, and CxOs to gain the insights and control they need to maximise productivity, meet compliance and performance standards, and reduce costs.

As a result, we are trusted by Fortune 500 and global companies, including BOSCH, Takeda Pharmaceutical, Boehringer Ingelheim and DHL, who rely on our innovation to drive greater value from Accounts Payable departments, increasing their contribution to business growth.

Got questions or want to learn more? Drop us a line at marketing@go-springtime.com

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