

How to Choose Accounts Receivable Automation Software



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Introduction

Hot take: You have yet to fully unlock your accounts receivable's potential for accelerating cash flow.

Why are we so sure? Because in our recent survey of 1,000 C-level executives, <u>96%</u> agree that there's still work to be done to digitize their AR.

To remain relevant, gain that coveted competitive edge, and position themselves for sustained growth, many businesses are turning to digital transformation projects—and rightfully so. There's a wealth of benefits to be gained through modernizing your infrastructure, optimizing existing businesses processes, focusing on delivering exceptional customer experiences, and freeing your workers to prioritize more strategic, impactful work.

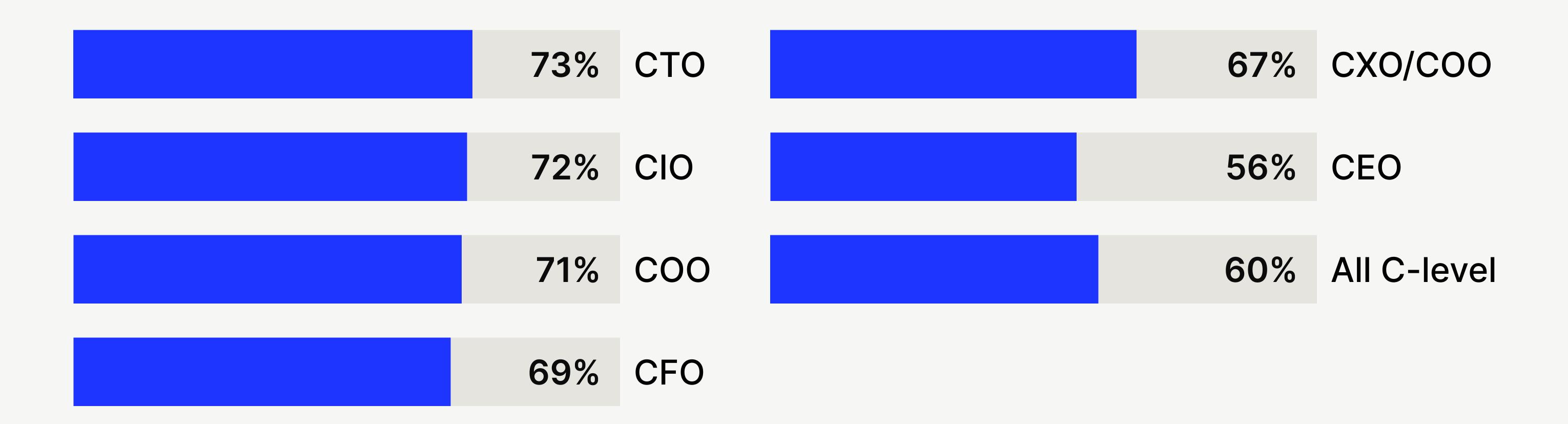
However, it's only now that accounts receivable is getting its moment in the sun. *Or perhaps, its 15 minutes at the town hall?*

Why? Well, up until recently, AR has simply been deprioritized in favor of other, moreseemingly lucrative digitization projects—as evidenced by the 60% of executives who agree that their company's AR departments haven't been prioritized as much as other departments for digitization.

The problem is, AR digitization is a fairly new concept, so for businesses looking to automate accounts receivable, there are understandably many questions that need answering.

And that's what brought you here today! To learn what value there is in automating your accounts receivable and to learn how to choose AR automation software. Buckle up, because this guide has everything you need —and then some—to help you confidently choose the best AR automation software.

Executives agree that AR is not prioritized for digitization





What is accounts receivable automation software (and why do you need it)?

First, some housekeeping. Simply put, accounts receivable automation software is software—typically deployed on-premises or in the cloud—that helps you streamline how you perform common accounts receivable processes, like:

- Generating and delivering invoices to customers
- Accepting and processing payments
- Matching and applying those payments to open invoices
- Ensuring financial reporting accuracy

These solutions will ease your burden of manual, administrative tasks so your AR team can operate with greater efficiency.

As to why businesses automate accounts receivable? Because they want to accelerate their cash flow. Yes, there are other reasons—including the benefits listed within this guide—but this is a common objective. This is important, because organizations today truly face some of the most challenging headwinds in decades.

Ninety-nine percent of executives in that same survey agree that forces outside of their control are creating major headaches for their business. This is increasing the pressure on their AR department's performance to close the gap.

AR automation software is swiftly becoming a necessity.

Global challenges impacting businesses

000/6

of executives agree that global challenges such as supply chain disruptions, rising energy costs, covid-19 and inflation cause the biggest headaches for AR departments

0 9 7 0/0

of executives identified more than 2 issues impact their AR department



What are the challenges of manual accounts receivable collections?

<u>Maximizing accounts receivable performance</u> requires a deft combination of elite efficiency, productivity, and yes, even <u>customer service</u>. Unfortunately, performing your collections activities manually makes finding that combination near impossible.

We all know that accounts receivable is challenging on a good day, and when your processes are strictly manual, they compound the difficulties your AR team deals with day in and day out.

For more detail on the subject, check out this comprehensive article on the <u>common problems with accounts receivable</u>. In the meantime, here are the top challenges AR teams tend to face, and the consequences of manual collections processes:

The top challenges AR teams face and the consequences of manual collections processes

1. Compiling and tracking information

When tracking the status of collections manually, AR teams often work across siloed, legacy systems, making efficient and accurate reporting difficult and compounding miscommunications—both internally and with customers.

2. Accepting electronic payments

When you can't easily accept digital payment methods securely and seamlessly, you end up forfeiting improvements to business efficiency and neglecting your customers' experience.

3. Getting paid quickly

Sluggish collections—a hallmark of manual processes—effectively provide customers with free financing at the expense of your business' bottom line.

4. Ensuring data entry and invoice accuracy

Invoice errors caused by manual data entry can lead to disputes and ultimately financial losses. Frequent billing errors can also make customers lose confidence in your company's effectiveness.

5. Resolving payment disputes

Traditional—read: manual—means of communicating with customers during the invoice to cash process equates to minimal visibility—for both parties—

of open receivables, often leading to payment disputes that are difficult to resolve quickly.

6. Standardizing collections outreach

Finance teams with highly manual accounts receivable processes will have a harder time standardizing their collections outreach, which makes it easier to miss important milestones for following up on outstanding invoices.

7. Maintaining good customer relations

When your AR processes fail to consider the customer—as manual ones often do—any attempts at improving efficiency are undermined.

8. Applying payments correctly

With a manual cash application process, the risk of applying payments incorrectly is much higher. Posting payments to incorrect invoices means your team will spend more time doing account reconciliation, which can impact your customers' credit availability.

9. Reconciling financial statements

Companies with manual AR processes often rely on multiple payment processors to accept payments, creating multiple data sources for AR specialists to record cash inflows from.



What are the benefits of accounts receivable automation software?

Now we're getting to the good stuff. Earlier, we teased the rationale behind businesses choosing to automate accounts receivable, but the list of benefits is truly astounding. We've consolidated the benefits of AR automation for you into the four key points below.

Here's what AR automation software can do for you:

1. AR automation accelerates cash flow

A healthy cash flow is worth its weight in gold—or checks... or credit cards... or wire transfers?

But actually having more cash flowing in than out—i.e., the essentials of sustainability—is easier said than done. Many businesses routinely burn through cash more rapidly than they bring it in—especially those in growth mode, or in the face of a tumultuous economy. The ugly truth is money and expansion are not forever (only diamonds are).

Simply put, not having positive cash flows means not having enough cash on hand to capitalize on lucrative opportunities when they arise. Even business as usual can be compromised when cash flows are stagnant.

Here's where AR automation can—and should—be used as a <u>strategic lever</u>. How quickly you collect cash hinges on the efficacy of numerous accounts receivable activities. Unfortunately, manual processes hamper all critical AR functions like invoicing, payment acceptance and processing, and collections management.



2. AR automation increases efficiencies and visibility

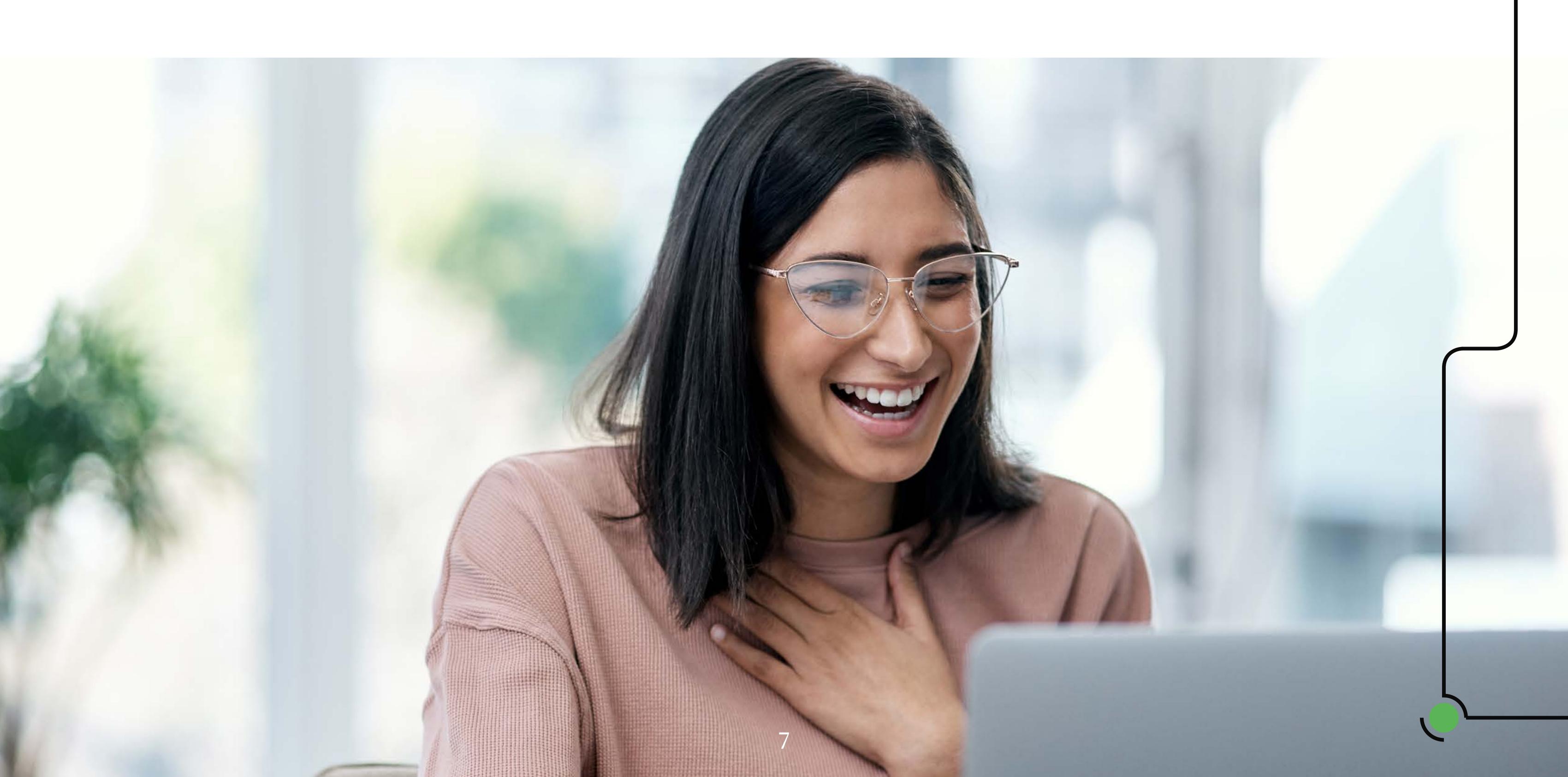
Efficiency is deceptively simple. It is, after all, just a <u>measure of productivity</u>. Your AR staff, however, will forever struggle to maximize their productivity if they're constrained and burdened by manual accounts receivable processes.

Improving efficiency should be on every business' to-do list. By doing so, they:

- Lower days sales outstanding
- Decrease billing and invoicing errors
- Allocate more hours to strategic work
- Lower employee turnover rates

With AR automation software, complete digitization of virtually all routine accounts receivable tasks—those processes that slow down your ability to collect payments—is achievable. For example, here's how automating accounts receivable can positively impact three crucial collections activities:

- Payment acceptance: A digital payment process helps you quickly collect billing information and encourages your customers to pay securely using their preferred methods.
- **Invoicing**: Automation will allow you to satisfy the invoicing needs of your customers and save you immense time manually preparing and delivering invoices.
- Cash application: Acquiring the ability to automate payment matching will allow you to capture and reconcile payment data and eliminate data entry errors.

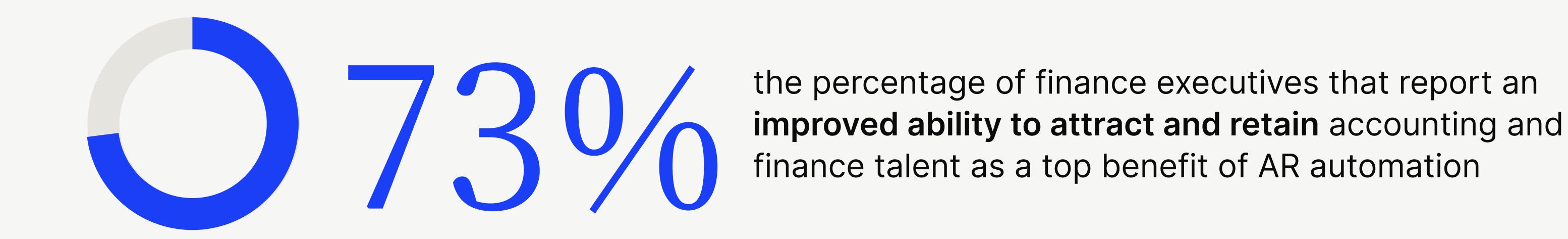




3. AR automation helps you attract and retain talent (and makes them more successful)

We surveyed 162 finance leaders to understand how AR automation software enables long-term remote work and ensures staff are equipped with what they need to add the greatest value to their companies. Respondents resoundingly agreed (75% of them) that by automating accounts receivable, they can increase bandwidth for their accounting and finance teams to take on strategic initiatives.

Another 73% cite an improved ability to attract and retain accounting and finance talent as benefit.



Source: Digital by Design: How AR Automation and Digitization Can Enable Long-Term Remote Work | Versapay and Industry Dive

For CFOs, AR automation software can be the solution to their talent attraction and retention woes—which are becoming increasingly commonplace, even towards the tail-end of the great resignation. Specifically, it aids CFOs in the following ways:

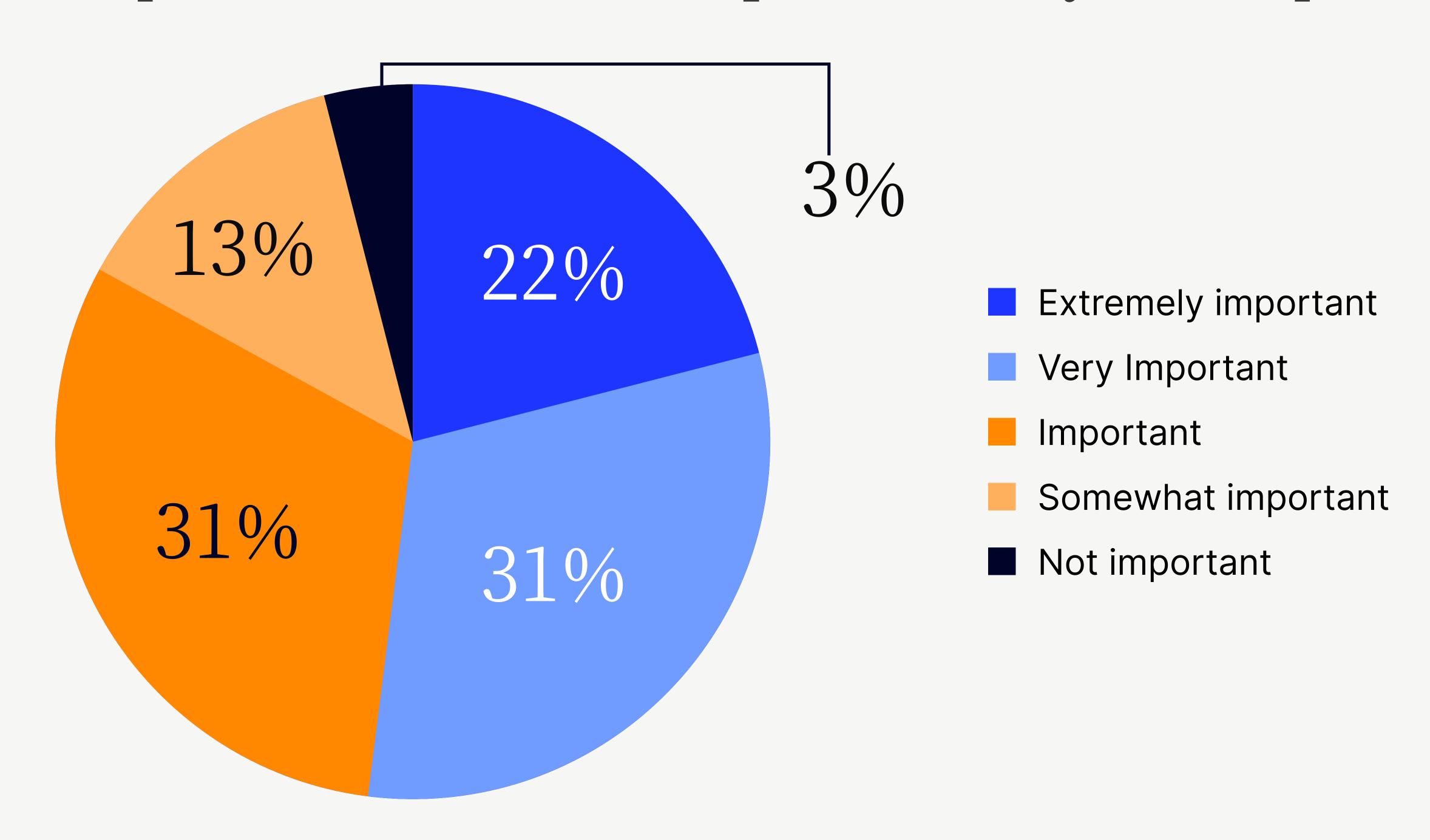
- Digitizing billing and payment processes helps staff maintain continuity while working from home. The ability to send invoices, request payments, and communicate more effectively with customers from anywhere allows AR teams to embrace an operating model that's more desirable—and crucial—than ever.
- Through automation, you eliminate much of the tedium from collecting on accounts receivable. Many mundane tasks—like printing invoices and stuffing envelopes or manually processing card details over the phone—become obsolete, making for more enjoyable days.
- Once no longer burdened by administrative mundanities, AR automation empowers AR professionals to take on more strategic work, enriching their involvement and opening opportunities for career advancement.



4. AR automation delivers better customer experiences

Your customers are the lifeblood of your business. So, it should come as no surprise that C-level executives widely agree (97% of them) that customer experience is an important component of their AR process.

How important is customer experience in your AR process?



Source: The State of Digitization in B2B Finance | Versapay and Wakefield Research

Interestingly, those same executives have clearly identified that the invoice to cash process—when gone unchecked—can negatively impact CX.

Enter, AR automation software.

This technology is known to strengthen customer relationships and simultaneously contribute to improved CX across the invoice to cash process.

It can do so by bridging the <u>AR Disconnect</u>—the gap that forms between you and your customers during the payment process. Manual AR processes tend to lack transparency into receivables and are full of ineffective communication methods. In automating your AR—with the right tools—you can circumvent this disconnect and deliver better CX.



[Checklists]

What should you look for in accounts receivable automation software

So, every accounts receivable automation software does the same thing right? Wrong. There are a lot of vendors out there; each touting different capabilities; each specializing in something unique; each promising something different.

In an ever-expanding marketplace, it's important you find an AR automation software that fits your exact needs. And, assuming you intend to grow and evolve your business, it's vital you partner with an AR automation vendor that's capable of growing with you, too.

The last thing you want is to have to compromise on your digitization goals because the solution you ultimately select is incapable of supporting them.

Unsure how exactly you'll achieve your digital transformation goals? Take our 6-minute assessment and learn which AR automation tools can bring your dreams to life.

Here are a series of checklists designed to help you cut through the noise when choosing accounts receivable automation software.

1. Invoicing and statements

Looking to automate invoice delivery across all channels? Here's what you should look for:

What to consider:	Yes	No
Does the platform support sending the volume of invoices your business needs?		
Does the platform support the invoice delivery channels your business needs (email, online, print, AP portals, etc.)?		
When emailed, does the platform allow you to attach a PDF version of the invoice?		
Does the platform provide automated delivery status tracking for invoices (email sent, email viewed, email opened, queued for mailing, etc.)?		
Does the platform allow you to send statements showing all open invoices manually or on a monthly basis?		



2. Payments

Looking to easily facilitate business-grade online payments and give your customers the convenient payment experience they expect? Here's what you should look for:

ayments		
What to consider:	Yes	No
Does the platform integrate with your ERP to reflect and sync payments in real time?		
Does the platform support the B2B payment methods your business needs (bank transfer/ACH, credit card, check, etc.)?		
Does the platform allow your customers to pay quickly via a secure payment page without needing to log into the portal?		
Does the platform allow your customers to store and manage their payment methods?		
Does the platform allow you to make a payment for a customer?		
Does the platform allow you to set rules for what types of payments customers can use and when?		
Does the platform allow you to designate which customers can pay by credit card and add a surcharge?		
Does the platform support recurring payments such as autopay and payment plans?		
Does the platform support credit handling and allow your customers to use credits to pay invoices?		
Does the platform support the various payment channels your business needs (ecommerce, POS, cash on delivery, bank lockbox, etc.)?		
Does the platform allow you to collect prepayments/deposits from existing and new customers?		
Does the platform support discounts and configurable payment incentive plans?		



3. Collections

Want to take the work out of accounts receivable collections? Here's what you should look for:

What to consider:	Yes	No
Does the platform provide access to real time outstanding receivables and allow you quickly navigate to a company, division, invoice, and line item?		
Does the platform allow you to segment your customers to prioritize the most critical collections tasks?		
Does the platform automate timely collection reminders to your customers?		
If collections reminders can be automated, can they be customized by frequency and language?		
Does the platform make it easy for your team members to collaborate on collections tasks including assigned follow-up tasks?		
Does the platform provide an audit trail that monitors all your team members' activity?		

4. Deductions and dispute management

Looking to track, manage, and resolve disputes more efficiently and capture more revenue? Here's what you should look for:

What to consider:	Yes	No
Does the platform allow your customers to open a dispute at the invoice or line- item level?		
Does the platform allow your customers to make a partial payment on an invoice supported with required reason codes aligned to your business needs?		
Does the platform provide an option for you to enable or disable customers to open disputes?		



5. Customer analytics

Looking to understand your accounts receivable successes and performance and find new areas for improvement? Here's what you should look for:

What to consider:	Yes	No
Does the platform provide insights into your account receivables reporting and trends (DSO, ADP, etc.)?		
Does the platform allow you to filter your AR reporting by customer and down to the division level to help uncover patterns in payment behavior?		
Does the platform allow you to easily export data to other systems to facilitate integrated corporate reporting?		

6. Cash application

Looking to automate your cash application process, easily capture and reconcile payment data, eliminate data entry errors, and speed up cash flow? Here's what you should look for:

What to consider:	Yes	No
Does the platform allow you to import traditional methods of payment (paper checks, wire transfer) and their disassociated remittances (emails, PDFs, AP portals, data files, etc.)?		
Does the platform read and extract useful information from digital and paper payments, and remittances, to reassociate them automatically?		
Does the platform allow you to configure match rules to apply payments to open receivables automatically?		
Does the platform use Al-based algorithms to auto-match traditional payments (paper checks, wire transfers) to open receivables?		
Does the platform allow your team to connect with customers directly in the platform to manage remaining unapplied payments and ask for clarification on which invoice(s) a payment is for?		



7. Collaboration and communication

Looking to engage your customers and work more collaboratively with them to accelerate payments and build extraordinary customer experiences? Here's what you should look for:

What to consider:	Yes	No
Does the platform allow your teams and customers to communicate back and forth to ask questions, request supporting documents, and resolve disputes directly in the portal?		
Does the platform allow you to collaborate with your team members such as leaving internal-only comments on customer accounts, invoices, and/or specific line items?		
Does the platform allow you to create your own customer segments and tailor the frequency and types of notifications by segment?		
Does the platform allow you to set up and route notifications to your own team, so they know when a customer disputes a charge or misses a payment?		
Does the platform allow your team members to send announcements, share important documents, and/or send specific pre-built requests to your customers?		
Does the platform allow you to attach and display the various supporting documents in the portal (proof of delivery, proof of service, bill of lading, etc.)?		

8. Customer experience

Looking to give your buyers better billing and payment experiences? Here's what you should look for:

What to consider:	Yes	No
Does the platform provide your customers with 24/7 access to shared invoice and account information with a secure, self-serve portal?		
Does the platform make it convenient for your customers to pay online (user-friendly, self-service, etc.)?		
Does the platform allow your customers to access their accounts and pay invoices via mobile?		
Does the platform allow your customers to toggle between multiple suppliers for an easy-to-use centralized payment portal		



9. Customer adoption

Looking to implement an AR automation solution that your customers will *actually use*? Here's what you should look for:

What to consider:	Yes	No
Does the platform provide your customers with 24/7 access to shared invoice and account information with a secure, self-serve portal?		
Does the platform make it convenient for your customers to pay online (user-friendly, self-service, etc.)?		
Does the platform allow your customers to access their accounts and pay invoices via mobile?		
Does the platform allow your customers to toggle between multiple suppliers for an easy-to-use centralized payment portal		

10. Ongoing support

Looking to partner with a vendor that's committed to helping you successfully transform your accounts receivable? Here's what you should look for:

What to consider:	Yes	No
Can the vendor provide resources (account managers, customer success services, etc.) to ensure ongoing success and achieve the highest ROI from their solutions?		
Does the vendor have a knowledgeable support team that's available during your working hours?		
Can the vendor provide best practices and self-service training resources to educate and train your team and customers on the platform?		



11. Security

Looking to partner with a vendor that takes security as seriously as it does automation? Here's what you should look for:

What to consider:	Yes	No
Does the platform have bank-grade security by meeting or exceeding one or more of the following standards: National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Center for Internet Security (CIS), and/or International Organization for Standardization (ISO)?		
Is the platform Payment Card Industry Data Security (PCI DSS) compliant?		
Is the platform SOC1 Type II and SOC 2 Type II compliant?		
Are customers' payments in the platform tokenized to limit interactions with sensitive payment data?		
Can the vendor provide all the necessary security reports your business needs, such as data backups and a disaster recovery plan?		

12. Cost

Looking for a solution that delivers substantial return on investment across the board? Here's what you should look for:

What to consider:	Yes	No
Does the vendor clearly show the ROI of their platform (hard savings and soft savings)?		
Is the vendor a payment facilitator that can offer interchange optimization for your business?		
Does the vendor's pricing model make sense for your business needs and future growth expectations?		

postage, headcount, time, current tech stack, etc.)?



How should you evaluate accounts receivable automation software?

Now that you know what to look for to automate accounts receivable, it's time to evaluate AR automation solutions. Here's a tip: share the checklists above with your team and use them as you work through your evaluation.

Here's our suggested course of action for determining which solution is best suited to your unique needs.



Step 1. Close your laptop and talk to your team (after reading this guide, of course)

Before you even consider firing up another tab to search furiously for all accounts receivable automation vendors—or some variation on that—take some time to connect with your team members whose work would be directly impacted by an AR automation solution.

Use this time to understand their modus operandi, and home in on the source of their frustrations. Work to disseminate opportunities, but also to ensure you don't

embark on a journey that'll ultimately result in you duplicating what may already be in place.

Questions to consider asking during this step:

- What are the issues we would like to resolve?
- What are the risks of not making any changes?
- Are these issues due to gaps in our technology stack, knowledge, or headcount?
- Which internal stakeholders should we include in the evaluation process?



Step 2. Begin your research by defining your current challenges and future goals

A principal factor in determining which AR automation software you ultimately choose should be how well it addresses your unique challenges and future goals. After all, it does you no good if your specific objectives cannot be achieved during your digital transformation journey.

Now, before you can find a solution to your troubles you need to first identify the gaps that exist within your current AR processes. Only once you've defined those will you understand where you have room to grow.



Questions to consider asking during this step:

- Which of our AR processes are currently under-optimized, and where can we streamline to relieve pain around wasted time, under-utilized talent, and delayed cash flow?
- Which AR processes do we believe are ripe for transformation (and what can we improve so that it's hyper-efficient, drives sustainable positive cash flow, and plays a pivotal role in creating exceptional experiences for customers and vendors)?
- Unsure how to answer these questions?

 In taking our 6-minute assessment, we'll uncover your AR needs and suggest the best path forward.



Step 3. Use the criteria (and checklists) above to identify which accounts receivable automation vendors can deliver what you need

Now's the time to get your hands dirty! Cast a wide net and quickly build your shortlist using the checklists above. Not all the information you need will be publicly available—I.e., on the vendor's website—so, you might need to get crafty.

Visit review sites and reputable third-party domains to try and fill the gaps. For whatever you can't easily find, be sure to request an answer if you decide to request a software demonstration.

Bonus—be sure to compare AR automation solutions directly:

- Versapay vs HighRadius
- Versapay vs BillTrust
- Versapay vs Quadient AR by YayPay



Step 4. Determine what post-implementation success looks like (and which vendors can ensure you're successful long-term)

While out-of-the-box capabilities are cool, it's equally cool to be confident that the partnership you enter will be fruitful for many years. Some solutions will be plug-and-play; others, less so. One's not necessarily better than the other, as what benefits you is highly circumstantial.

That said, if your needs are complex, it's important you gauge during your evaluation how competent each AR automation solution is—or will be—at scaling to meet your demands. It's important you work with a vendor who can deliver against a host of requirements, whether you need them now, or years down the road.

But perhaps most crucial—and most critical to long-term success—is determining upfront whether your customers will adopt your newly implemented software or not. <u>Customer payment portals</u>, for example, are common features of AR automation software. If the vendor you partner with is incapable of <u>helping</u> you drive adoption of it, that's a red flag.

Questions to consider asking during this step:

- Does the vendor have a strategy to encourage rapid adoption among employees and customers?
- Does the vendor provide the right amount of training for employees to master the new features within the system?
- What support can the vendor offer us to ensure our ongoing success postimplementation?



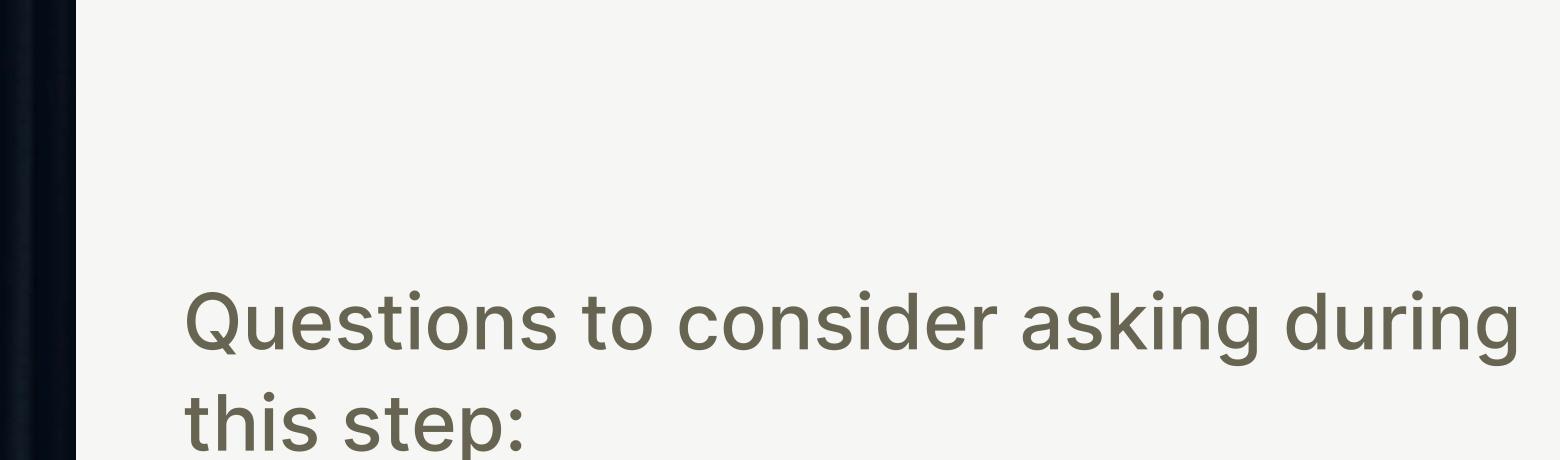


Step 5. Once you've whittled down your shortlist, get demonstrations of the software

Now to the fun part! Once you've narrowed down your list of suitors, reach out and request a demonstration of each. This is the best way to get a feel for the software.

During this step, be sure to push the vendor to show you functionality that is hyper-relevant to your use case. A vendor that defaults to showing you a generic demonstration might not be capable of delivering against your needs. Also, be sure to consider any customizations you may need, and factor in any additional costs that may come with them.

→ Looking to save yourself some time? Here's a link to Versapay's get a demo page 6.



- Can you show me how your software helps me achieve this particular goal?
- I have a particular problem. How can your software help me?
- What other clients within my industry do you serve? Can you provide me with testimonials and case studies?



Step 6. Get stakeholder buy-in and make a final decision

Last—but certainly not least—you'll want to consolidate your findings and vendor analyses and share them with all stakeholders involved. Note that some of these stakeholders should be involved during the other stages, too—primarily the demonstration and other high-level discussions you find yourself having with vendors.

Then, request quotes and proposals from whichever vendor(s) you're most satisfied with. And that is how you choose AR automation software.



Next steps for digital transformation

Now that you know what AR automation software is, the benefits of accounts receivable automation software, and how to automate accounts receivable, it's time to figure out which solution is best suited for solving your unique challenges.

Take our <u>6-minute assessment</u> and get your personalized accounts receivable transformation roadmap to learn exactly where you are in your digital AR journey, how you stack up against peers, and how to set your AR team up for success.



Alongside connecting customers with AR teams over the cloud to increase efficiency, accelerate cash flow, and deliver exceptional customer experiences, Versapay's <u>Collaborative AR automation platform</u> is designed for growth. Versapay offers a variety of solutions that can be purchased individually or together to meet your business' unique needs, including:

- Integrated payment processing
- Electronic invoicing
- Cloud-based dispute management
- Al-powered cash application, and
- AP portal connectivity

Versapay is designed to scale your AR automation when you're ready, however you need it to. You'll never have to compromise on your goals—even if you haven't yet defined them.