

THE STATE OF ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE AUTOMATION 2026

Trends Shaping the Next
Phase of AR Transformation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For enterprise AR teams, the gap between what's possible and what's practiced has never been wider or more expensive to ignore.

The *State of AR Automation 2026* survey, conducted by NACM in collaboration with BlackLine, drew on responses from finance and credit professionals across industries to take the pulse of a function under pressure. The picture that emerges is not one of stagnation, but of tension: organizations that know automation is inevitable, teams that are ready to evolve, and a set of trust and accountability questions that are slowing the transition at exactly the moment speed matters most.

Three findings define that tension:

Manual work still dominates. Despite years of automation conversation in finance, the day-to-day reality for most AR teams has barely moved. Half of all respondents named reducing manual, repetitive tasks as their single top operational priority for the next 18 months—not as a future aspiration, but as their most urgent need today.

Interest in AI is real. Trust in AI is not. More than eight in ten respondents expect their organization to further automate AR. Yet 80% currently use no AI in their AR processes. When asked about AI handling customer interactions, not a single respondent said they would be very comfortable with it. The demand is there. The confidence to act on it is not.

AR professionals want to lead, not just process. The most consistent signal in the data isn't frustration, it's aspiration. Respondents aren't asking to be protected from change. They're asking to be positioned for it: more time for analysis, more visibility into risk, more influence on the decisions that flow from their data.



Together, these findings point toward something larger than an efficiency story. AR sits at the intersection of customer relationships, cash flow and financial reporting. What happens, or fails to happen, in AR has consequences that extend well beyond the AR ledger. The organizations that move deliberately now, with the right architecture and the right accountability model, will find themselves with a structural advantage that compounds over time. Those that wait are not standing still. Those that wait will fall behind.

In assessing these challenges:

- 33% said they lack the right tools to analyze and visualize data or generate predictive insights
- 28% reported that their data is siloed across ERPs, spreadsheets and CRM systems
- 20% said that even when they have data, translating it into actionable decisions is a persistent challenge
- 9% stated that frequent manual errors make it hard to rely on the data provided

Together, these responses point to limited visibility. Teams are processing transactions, but often without a clear view of patterns or risk.

One of the clearest themes in the survey was the desire to spend less time on routine administrative work and more time on activities that require expertise and judgment. For many AR teams, the challenge is not a lack of effort but how that effort is being allocated. Manual processes, disconnected systems and repetitive tasks continue to consume valuable time that could otherwise be spent managing risk, supporting customers or contributing to broader business objectives. As organizations look to modernize their receivables operations, reducing this burden remains one of the most immediate opportunities for improvement.

When it comes to using data to manage your AR portfolio, what is the biggest obstacle your team currently faces?

33%

We lack the tools to properly analyze, visualize, or get predictive insights from our data.

28%

Our data is siloed across too many different systems (ERP, spreadsheets, CRM), making it hard to see the full picture.

20%

We collect plenty of data, but translating it into decisions is the challenge.

9%

Frequent manual errors make it hard to rely on our data.

4%

Our data is stale; by the time we get reports, the situation has already changed.

Which of the following external factors are creating the biggest challenges for your accounts receivable team right now?

37%

Deteriorating Customer Financial Health: A noticeable increase in the number of customers who are paying late, defaulting, or declaring bankruptcy.

2%

Increasing Regulatory & Compliance Demands:

The growing complexity of keeping up with new tax laws, data privacy regulations, or potential e-invoicing mandates.

20%

Economic Instability: General economic uncertainty or inflation is making it much harder to forecast cash flow and manage credit risk effectively.

28%

Pressure on Headcount and Resources: Facing internal pressure to manage a growing workload without additional staff or budget.

9%

Increased Sophistication of Fraud Attempts:

Dealing with a rise in fraudulent activities targeting payments and customer data.

2%

Supply Chain & Fulfillment Issues:

A significant portion of payment delays and disputes is caused by customers not receiving their goods or services on time.

The data clearly shows that deteriorating customer financial health is the most significant external challenge, cited by 37% of respondents. This is closely followed by pressure on headcount and resources at 28%. These two factors alone account for two-thirds of the top challenges, painting a picture of AR teams caught between rising external risks and internal constraints. On one hand, worsening customer financial health is creating more late payments, defaults, and collection complexity. On the other, many organizations are expecting teams to absorb that added workload without additional headcount. For many AR departments, the challenge is no longer just keeping up with invoices and collections, but balancing rising risk with limited time and capacity.

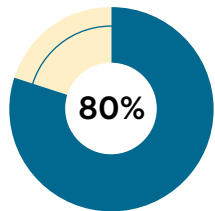


Even with these challenges, AI adoption remains limited, with 80% of AR teams reporting no use of AI in their AR processes. Among the small minority who do, use is concentrated in a narrow range of applications:

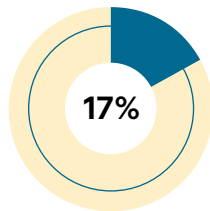
- Prioritization of collections outreach based on risk and payment predictions (17%)
- Prediction of customer payment behavior (9%)
- Automated deduction validation (7%)



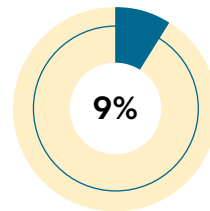
Which of the following areas within the accounts receivable process are you currently applying AI or advanced automation?



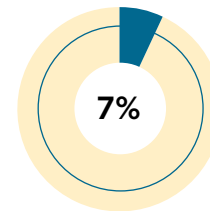
None. We do not use AI in our accounts receivable process.



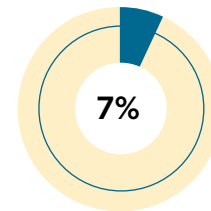
Prioritizing collections outreach based on risk and payment predictions



Predicting customer payment behavior and identifying at-risk accounts



Automated deduction and discount validation against contracts

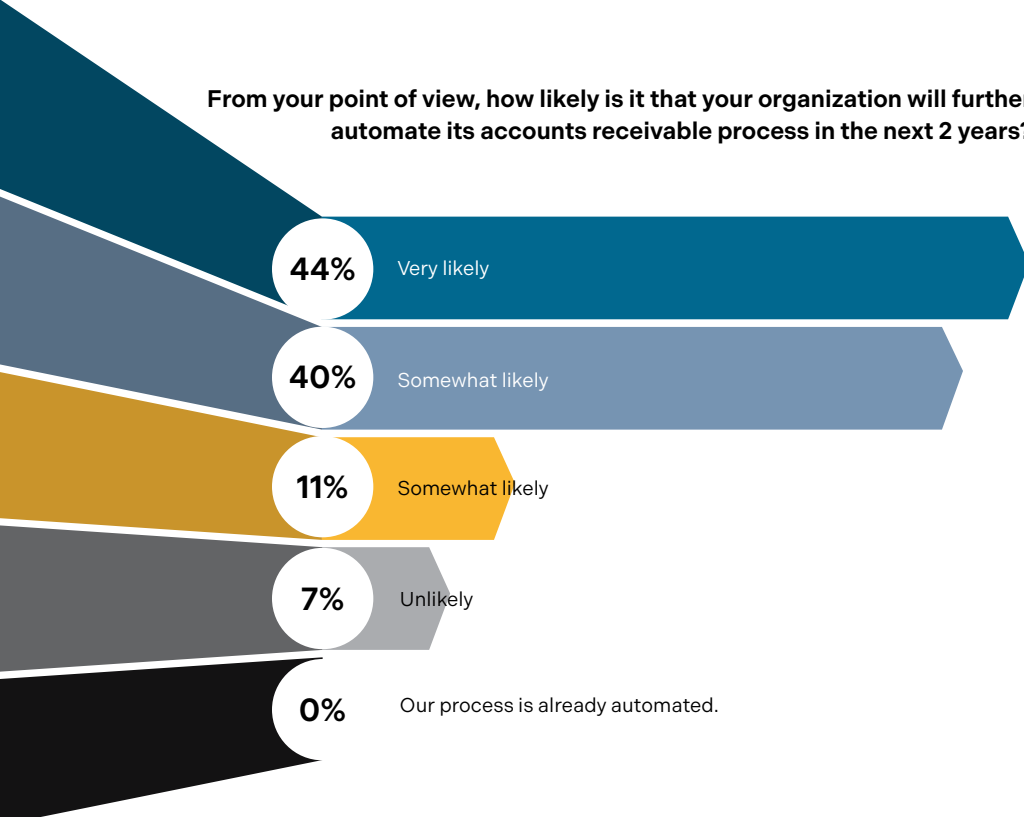


Identifying potential revenue leakage from billing errors or uncollected fees

AR TEAMS SEE AI'S POTENTIAL— BUT DON'T FULLY TRUST IT YET

Interest in automation is clear. The data reveals 44% of respondents believe it is “very likely” their organization will further automate AR, while another 40% stated it is “somewhat likely.” At the same time, no respondent reported having a fully automated process.

From your point of view, how likely is it that your organization will further automate its accounts receivable process in the next 2 years?

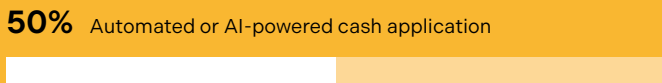
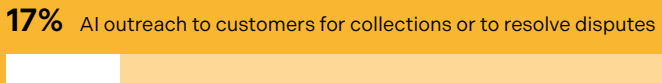
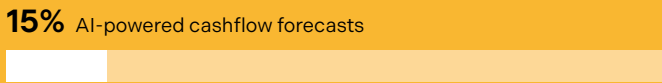
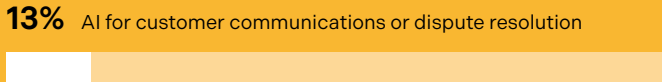


Current and planned initiatives reflect a focus on practical applications. Automated or AI-supported cash application is already implemented or underway at 50% of organizations. Other areas include:

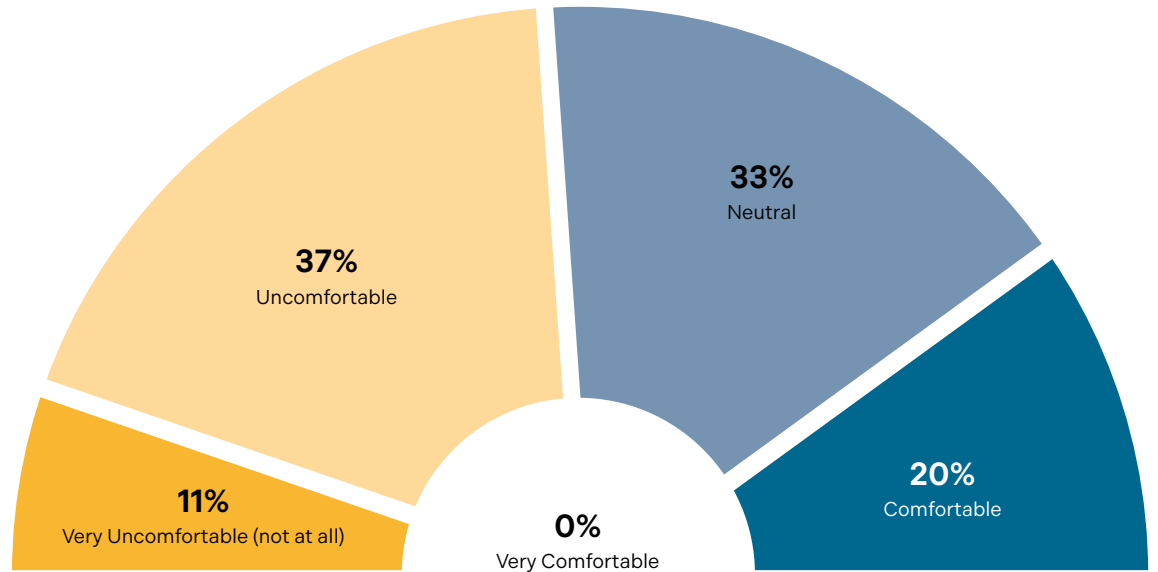
- 17% exploring AI for collections outreach and dispute resolution
- 15% implementing AI for cash flow forecasting

Automated or AI-powered cash application stands out as the most widely adopted initiative, with half of all respondents either implementing it today or planning to do so. This comes as no surprise, as cash application sits at the center of the AR workflow, touching everything from payment processing to cash visibility. For years, it has been one of the most labor-intensive areas of the receivables process. The strong adoption numbers suggest that AR teams are not chasing automation for automation's sake. They are targeting the areas where inefficiencies are most visible and where improvements can deliver immediate business value.

Has your organization implemented or are they planning to implement, any of the following for AR processes?



How comfortable would you feel having Agentic AI interact directly with your customers? (Assuming you could control who the AI interacted with, when, how often, etc.)



When it comes to agentic AI, the comfort level drops sharply. When asked how they would feel about AI handling customer interactions (even with full controls over who it contacts, when and how often), a combined 48% of respondents are either “Uncomfortable” or “Very Uncomfortable.” Notably, not a single respondent reported being “Very Comfortable.”

The gap between enthusiasm for AI and comfort with customer-facing applications is difficult to ignore. AR teams may be willing to

automate workflows, but many remain reluctant to automate relationships. Customer interactions often involve disputes, payment issues and conversations that require context, judgment and a clear understanding of the customer relationship. As organizations explore agentic AI, the survey serves as a reminder that technology is only one part of the equation. Preserving trust, maintaining accountability and delivering a positive customer experience remain equally important considerations.

When it comes to bringing AI into your day-to-day process, which of the following concerns you the most?



The pattern is clear: AI is welcome behind the scenes. Put in front of customers, though, and confidence drops sharply.

The deeper concern is one of accountability and transparency. The inability to explain AI decisions was cited by 40% of respondents as their primary concern. In AR, decisions often require clear justification to customers and auditors.

Additional concerns include:

- 24% worried about reduced critical thinking due to overreliance on AI
- 20% concerned about responsibility for AI-driven errors

Clarity and control aren't nice-to-haves—they're the precondition for adoption.

What stands out about these concerns is that they extend beyond the technology itself. At their core, they speak to the responsibilities AR professionals carry every day. Financial decisions rarely exist in a vacuum. They must be communicated to customers, justified to auditors and supported by clear reasoning. The survey results suggest that many respondents are less concerned with whether AI can produce an answer than whether that answer can be understood, challenged and defended when necessary. For organizations exploring AI adoption, that distinction is critical.

AR TEAMS ARE READY TO BECOME STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Perhaps the most telling finding in the survey is the consistency with which AR professionals express a desire for more meaningful work. This isn't frustration with the work itself but recognition that the role is evolving.

In evaluating what they see as the single most exciting opportunity that AI could create for their teams:

- 52% of respondents chose removing tedious, repetitive tasks so they can focus on work that requires genuine expertise
- 24% pointed to the ability to apply that expertise more strategically, helping AR professionals contribute to key company goals like cash flow and profitability, which
- 9% of respondents see as a direct impact of AI
- 15% expressed a desire to transform their team into a true strategic partner, providing valuable cash flow and risk insights to sales, finance and leadership

For years, much of AR's success has been measured through operational metrics—collections performance, dispute resolution and payment processing. The survey points toward a broader ambition. As automation reduces the burden of routine work, AR professionals want more opportunities to apply their expertise where it can have a greater impact. Risk assessment, cash flow planning and business decision-making are no longer viewed as adjacent responsibilities. They are increasingly becoming central to how AR teams define their value.

Thinking about the future of your role and your team, what is the single most exciting opportunity that AI in accounts receivable could create?

52%

Removing tedious, repetitive tasks and focusing on work that actually requires our team's expertise.



24%

Freeing up time to use our expertise more strategically, like spotting risk early and solving complex payment challenges proactively.



15%

Transforming our team into a strategic partner that provides valuable cash flow and risk insights to the rest of the business (sales, finance and leadership).



9%

Having a more direct impact on key company goals like cash flow and profitability.



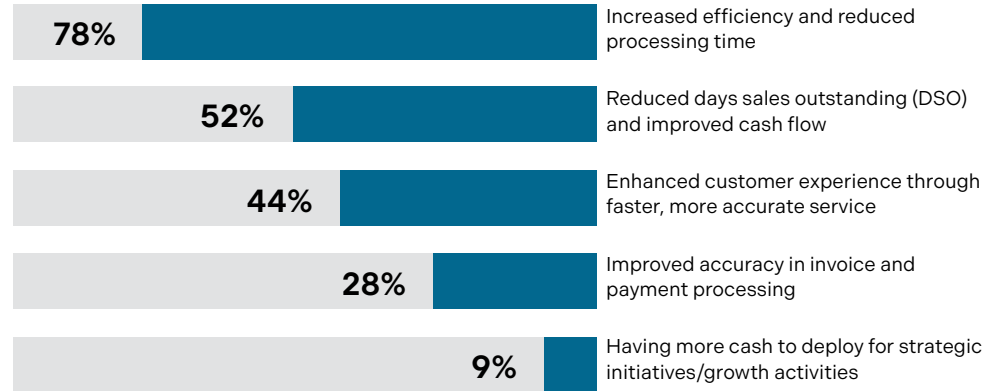
Expected benefits of automation reflect a similar shift. While 78% cited efficiency gains, respondents also pointed to:

- Reduced days sales outstanding (DSO) and improved cash flow (52%)
- Improved customer experience through faster, more accurate service (44%)

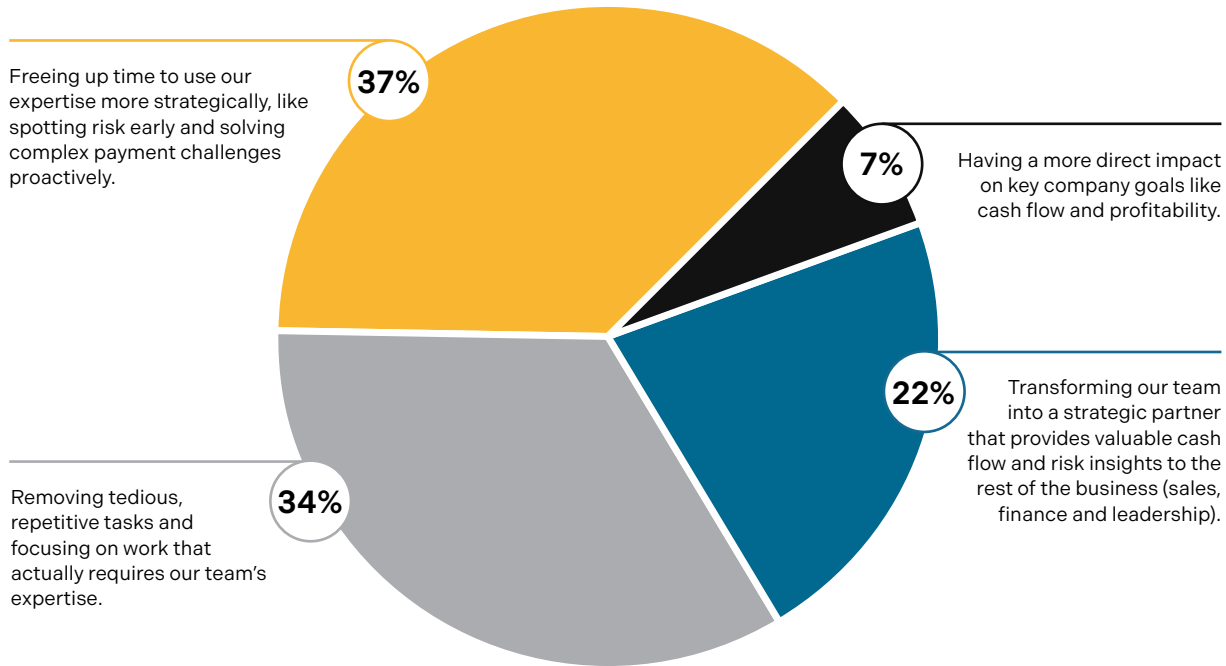
AR professionals are not simply looking to do the same work faster. They want to deliver better outcomes for the business, seeing automation as the tool that gets them there.

The discussion around automation often starts with productivity gains, but the survey reveals a much bigger opportunity. Improved accuracy in invoice and payment processing can strengthen confidence in financial data, reduce avoidable friction and create a clearer picture of receivables performance. More importantly, respondents are connecting those improvements to outcomes that matter across the business, including cash flow, profitability and growth. That shift is significant. When automation becomes a contributor to financial performance rather than simply an operational initiative, the conversation changes from cost savings to business value.

In regard to KPIs, what do you see as the primary benefit you expect from automating your accounts receivable process?



As you think about the future, which of these skills will be most critical to develop within your AR team to maximize its value to the business?



The data tells a nuanced story about what “strategic partnership” looks like in practice. When asked which skills they believe will be most critical to develop in their AR teams to maximize value to the business, 37% prioritized strategic risk management and early identification of payment challenges, while 34% once again emphasized freeing capacity from repetitive work.



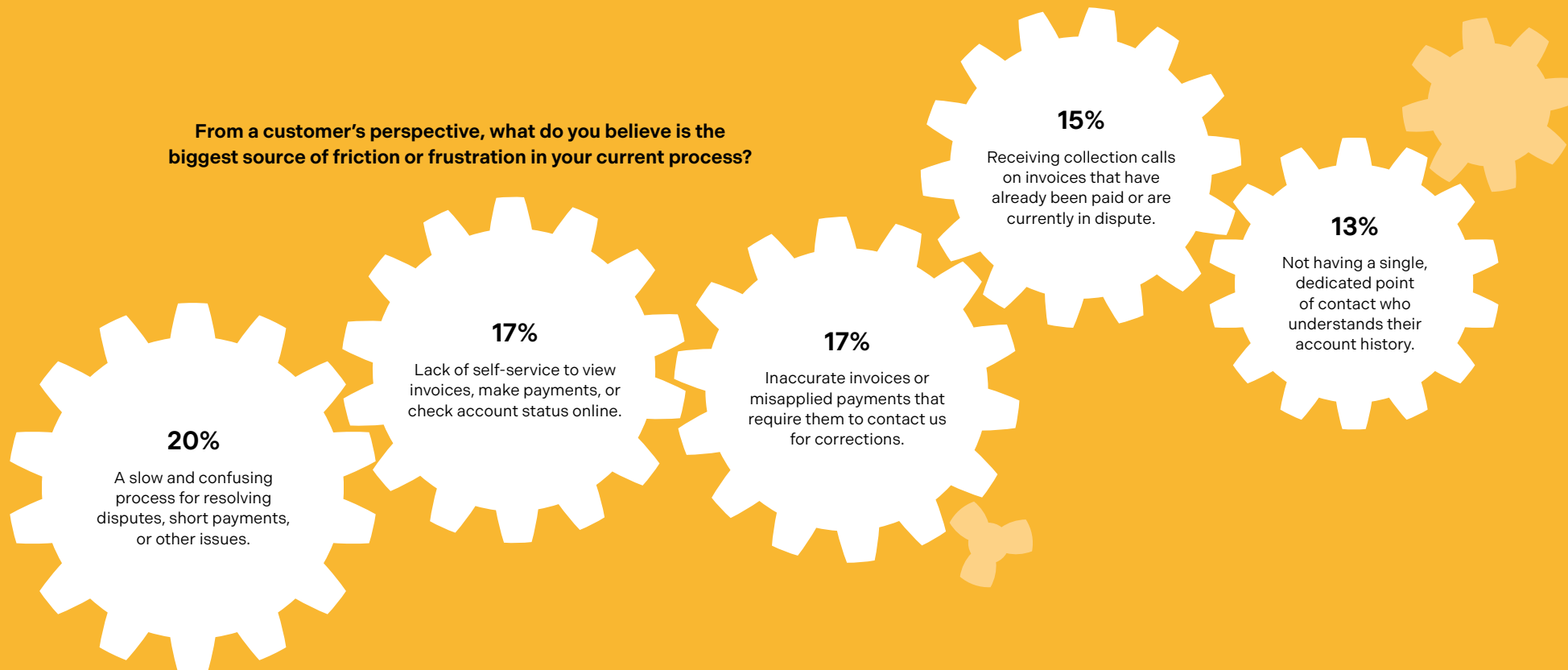
From the customer's perspective, the survey reveals friction points that closely align with these evolving priorities. The leading sources of customer frustration include:

- Slow and confusing dispute resolution processes (20%)
- Inaccurate invoices or misapplied payments (17%)
- The absence of self-service options (17%)

These are precisely the problems that well-implemented AR automation can address—not by removing the human from the relationship, but by giving humans better tools to resolve issues quickly, accurately and at scale.

The lack of a single point of contact who understands a customer's account history was cited by 13% of respondents, underscoring the importance of consistency in customer interactions. While automation can help streamline processes, customers still value dealing with someone who understands the context behind their account and can provide informed guidance when issues arise, suggesting that successful AR transformation will require balancing technological advancement with personalized service.

From a customer's perspective, what do you believe is the biggest source of friction or frustration in your current process?



THE OPPORTUNITY IN THE TENSION

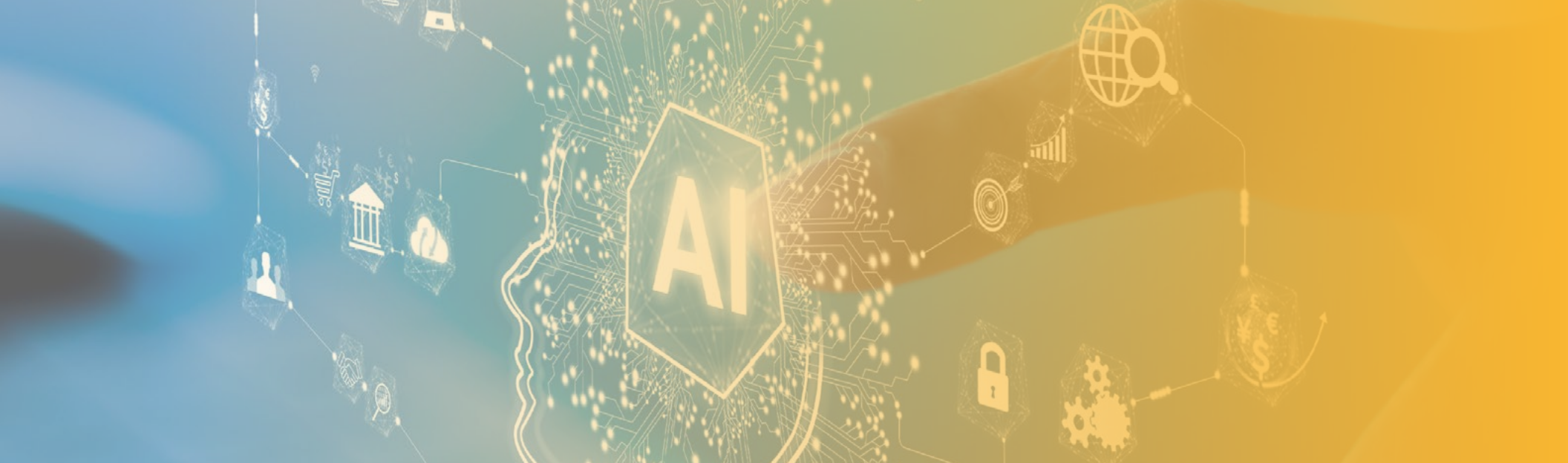
The 2026 State of AR Automation survey points to a function in transition. AR teams are ready for change, but still weighing the risks. There is clear interest in AI, alongside a continued focus on accuracy and accountability.

While the desire for transformation is there, the goal is not just greater efficiency but greater impact. AR teams are looking to reduce manual workload, improve decision-making and contribute more broadly to business outcomes.

The AR function doesn't operate in isolation—its data touches credit, cash forecasting and the integrity of the financial close. Organizations that recognize this will build their AR strategy accordingly.

The function is ready. The question now is whether organizations will build the infrastructure, the data architecture, the accountability model, and the governance to meet that readiness.





National Association of Credit Management (NACM) was founded in 1896 to promote good laws for sound credit, protect businesses against fraudulent debtors, improve the interchange of credit information, develop better credit practices and methods, and establish a code of ethics. Education and research programs illustrate NACM's awareness of the complex needs of credit management today. Members of NACM are credit and financial executives, primarily representing manufacturers, wholesalers, financial institutions and varied service organizations.



BLACKLINE

BlackLine (Nasdaq: BL), the future-ready platform for the Office of the CFO, drives digital finance transformation by empowering organizations with accurate, efficient, and intelligent financial operations. Built on the **Studio360 platform**, BlackLine unifies data, streamlines processes, and delivers real-time insights through automation and intelligence powered by Verity, a comprehensive suite of embedded, auditable AI capabilities that provides finance and accounting teams with a new digital workforce.

With a proven, collaborative approach and a track record of innovation supported by industry-leading R&D investment and world-class security practices, more than 4,300 customers across multiple industries partner with BlackLine to lead their organizations into the future. For more information, visit blackline.com.