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# THE ENTERPRISE LEADER'S GUIDE TO BUYING AP AUTOMATION

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/ PART 4/

SELECTING YOUR AP AUTOMATION  
PROVIDER

Reading time: 21 minutes

# SELECTING YOUR AP AUTOMATION PROVIDER

Direct Commerce delivers AP automation software solutions to the world's largest companies. This guide to defining your requirements for AP automation is part of [The Enterprise Leader's Guide to Buying AP Automation](#). Based on over 20 years of AP automation experience, the guide is designed to help you prepare your buying team as you search for the best AP automation solution for your enterprise. You can find further resources from our AP Automation Buying Guide at [this link](#) or by emailing [info@directcommerce.com](mailto:info@directcommerce.com).

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## Key Insights

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- Before you head to the market to start talking to AP automation vendors, put your tools in place first, including your strategic business problem statement, your AP process maps, and your solution requirements.
- There are a number of ways to engage with AP automation vendors, and the smartest avenue for your business increases efficiency in your buying process, engages your internal stakeholders, and may begin with your buying team's networks.
- In a world full of information, planning what content and conversations to engage with can help speed up your buying process and eliminate distraction.
- Vendor engagement may alter your understanding of your business problem and the requirements you first went to the AP automation market may be changed by what you learn. Be willing to revisit those tools internally and make sure your intended outcomes can be met by solution providers.

You can find further resources from our AP Automation Buying Guide at [this link](#) or by emailing [info@directcommerce.com](mailto:info@directcommerce.com).

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# Get your buying tools in order BEFORE you talk to AP automation vendors.

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It's a classic mistake – you have to buy a new AP automation solution for your business and the first thing you've been asked to do is meet with vendors. So, you start by filling out forms on websites and meeting with solution providers. After a number of video calls with sales people you have a list of compelling features and functions. However, you still aren't sure after weeks of meetings if this is truly what your business needs.

Engaging solution providers in the AP automation market before you know what you need can lead to delays, overspending, and purchase regret.

You need tools to ready yourself for the market - tools that help you align your team, efficiently complete your buying process and ensure the best solution for your AP automation needs.

If you haven't already, gather your buying team to equip themselves with these tools:

- **[Strategic Business Problem Statement](#)** - Your strategic business problem statement is the north star of your AP automation buying process. Writing the best possible statement will enable an efficient process while leaving you open to creative solutions you hadn't previously considered. Find our guide on writing your strategic business problem statement [here](#).
  - **[AP Process Map](#)** - A complete and accurate AP process map empowers the AP automation buying team to vet, critique, and select the right AP automation solution for your enterprise by identifying the parts of your process that can either be replaced, removed, retained, or transformed by the right AP automation solution. Find our guide on creating AP process maps [here](#).
  - **[AP Automation Solution Requirements](#)** - Taking the time your team needs to efficiently understand your solution requirements will avoid purchase regret, unify your team, and ensure the fastest, most compliant way to transform AP. Find our guide on documenting your AP automation solution requirements [here](#).
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# The Steps to Choosing Your AP Automation Provider

Depending on your enterprise size and the scope of your AP automation project, your journey to vendor selection may take you longer than you expect. [If you've spent time preparing](#), you've created tools that will help you keep your buying project as efficient as possible.

You'll know you've found the right AP automation solution when your research and solution provider interactions lead you to a solution with features and functionality that matches your [solution requirements](#), and, with that solution in mind, you can create a solid business case that aligns to your budget and your critical outcomes.

After you've prepared your team with your [strategic business problem statement](#), your [AP process maps](#) and your [solution requirements](#), your buying process for the right AP automation should follow these steps (each of which is explained further below):

1. Find solution providers
2. Research solutions
3. Compare your findings to your solution requirements and assemble critical questions for a shortlist of vendors
4. Reengage your shortlisted vendors
5. Create a final assessment of solutions



Aligning your team with [the right tools](#) will set your team up for success at every step of the buying process.

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# Where will you find AP automation solution providers?

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Looking out at the AP automation market can feel daunting when there are so many solution providers. Here are pathways most companies are using to find the right solution for their needs:

## **Consulting or IT Services**

Big budgets and big risks often lead buying teams to invest in expertise. A consultant or team of consultants with experience in AP automation buying may be able to help, and while it will increase your overall spend on your AP project, often by quite a lot, consultants may be able to lead you with more speed and efficiency to the solution that offers the highest impact with the lowest risk.

## **Peer Referral**

The personal networks of your AP or buying teams may be able to offer quick connections to the solution you need. If your team doesn't have access to a great network for this kind of advice, there are a few to tap into. Professional organizations like the Institute for Finance and Management or the Shared Services and Outsourcing Network offer peer groups for networking among finance leaders who may be able to point you in the right direction, while networks of experts can be found at analyst firms like Gartner or Forrester.

## **Digital and In-Person Events**

Digital events, especially demos and product launches can build your knowledge of what's available in the market and who is providing solutions similar to what you need. Documenting the features and functions you see during these engagements and matching them to your [AP automation solution requirements](#) may be tedious but will start to help you understand not only which solutions stand out, but which of your requirements could be met by solutions you encounter.

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In person events like Shared Services and Outsourcing Week can provide an opportunity to window shop solutions. Before you go, check the event's website for sponsors and the agenda. Compile a list of solution providers in AP automation and set up as many one-to-one meetings as you can with relevant providers, especially if their product content matches many of your solution requirements. Setting up these meetings ahead of time will save you time and allow you to explore these solutions more deeply in person, better using the investment made in attending. (Tip: If you can't make an in-person event, check the list of sponsors and speakers in AP automation and set up your own schedule of meetings. Those providers will happily speak to you outside of the event as well.)

## **Online Solution Marketplaces**

Large solution providers like ERPs, workflow automation tools and others have their own solution marketplaces. These digital storefronts allow you to quickly find providers that integrate with the solutions you already have in place. (Tip: Official marketplaces are often resale opportunities for the solution provider. Other solutions may not be listed. And providers without official resale marketplaces often have a list of solutions they integrate with. Ask your ERP or other technology providers for a list of AP automation solutions they integrate with.)

## **Supplier Referrals**

You already have great relationships with your largest suppliers. And your largest suppliers have to tackle these issues as well. Ask your supplier's AR team who they love working with and if they can help connect you to the team working on AP. They may have a solution referral perfect for your needs.

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# Aligning your solution provider shortlist to your AP automation solution requirements

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The most critical step in identifying the right solution provider for your business is the alignment of your solution requirements to the solution providers' product offerings.

This process is daunting but ultimately there are three activities that dominate this part of the buying process: Research, Collaboration, and Reengagement.

## **Researching potential solution providers**

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After you've set up your first meetings but ideally before you've met, you'll need to research their offerings and compare those offerings to your AP process map and solution requirements. Below are five resources you should ask your potential solution providers for:

### *Product overviews and demo videos*

Make sure you've accessed product overviews and demo videos. If your meeting with a solution provider is already scheduled, reach out ahead of time and ask for the content that matches your needs (invoice capture, variance managements, dispute resolution, etc.) Measure those against your [solution requirements](#).

### *Implementation guides*

You don't need an exhaustive implementation schedule, but ask the solution provider for a typical schedule with milestones from now until you reach your intended outcomes. This should include any configurations, change management, internal training, set up, and integrations.

### *Case studies and client referrals*

Customer success stories in the form of case studies or client referrals are incredible resources. The best content here will give you confidence in buying as well as inspire questions you didn't know you needed to ask.

## *Business case development guides*

You will have to sell this solution internally to many stakeholders. These may include your leadership team, other departments of the business, suppliers, internal users and even members of your buying team. Ask how your solution provider supports business case development including how they guide financial business case building.

## *Product Roadmaps*

Technology changes rapidly. You'll want enterprise-tested solutions today, but you can't always predict what your business will need in the future. Your potential solution provider's product roadmap should give you confidence that you won't be left behind as new technologies change the way you and your competitors are doing business in the years to come.

### ***How to get the most out of customer reference calls***

Customer reference calls are incredible resources in an AP automation buying process. Often a provider must keep their customer or client identities confidential. But you can always ask for a current customer to speak with, and if you are able to connect, preparing well for this call will help you maximize this incredible resource. Here are six questions you should make sure to ask on your call -

1. What is the most critical ROI metric in your AP process and how did this AP automation solution help you achieve it?
2. How satisfied would you say your AP managers are with the solution? Your AP leaders? And your CFO?
3. What are the most important features of the AP automation solution? Which are the most used?
4. How do you measure success in the solution? What reports or dashboards help you the most when measuring success?
5. What was the implementation process like for you and your solution provider? What hurdles did you overcome? Is there anything you would do differently before or during implementation?
6. Are there any insights you wish you had now about this solution that you didn't learn until using it?



## Collaborate with the solution providers on your shortlist


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Once you've evaluated potential solutions using the research you've conducted on their offerings, meeting with those solution providers should help you confirm your findings, address any gaps, and assess any potential risks in your relationship with your solution provider.

View solution providers as collaborators. At Direct Commerce, for example, we consider ourselves a part of the team, working to understand solution requirements and current AP processes so that we can directly address the impact our solution can have toward meeting your AP automation needs. (Tip: If your meetings with solution providers don't feel collaborative, then your long term relationship with the solution provider will not be a collaboration, and they won't be able to work with you as your business grows.)

Here are common questions to ask to better understand the ROI potential of your AP automation purchase:

- What impact do your products make for your clients and what features deliver that value?
- What are the most common KPIs your customers point to when they describe the success your solution has helped them achieve? How are those KPIs measured and reported within your solution?
- What have been some of the biggest obstacles to achieving that success? How have you helped your customers overcome those challenges?
  - What are the biggest risks to achieving a successful and efficient implementation?



Additionally, ask your solution provider to address your solution requirements and walk through your AP process maps. They may even be able to redraw your process maps, helping you understand how they will eliminate unnecessary effort, drive more efficiency and maintain data integrity.

## Reevaluate and reengage solution providers

After evaluating solution providers, you should be able to create a shortlist of providers that meet your business needs and align with your budget. Still, you will likely find that your engagement with those on your shortlist and the research you've conducted into their solution has revealed potential new requirements for your AP automation solution. Make sure to stay aligned to your strategic business problem statement as you reevaluate any new requirements to prevent scope creep and increasing budget.

Engagement with solutions providers can go on for weeks or months depending on the size of your business, the scope of your project and the time you have to complete your buying project. To achieve the best results, continually reevaluate new information, scrutinizing new efforts or exploratory tagents against your actual business needs. Indicators that your scope is creeping too wide may be the growing size of stakeholders involved in your buying process or the rapid expansion of your solution requirements.

### ***Why some enterprises take their buying projects to RFP and why others don't.***

There are great reasons for and against taking your buying project to a Request for Proposal or RFP. Here are pros and cons:

#### Pros

- Enterprise compliance requirements
- Customization requirements or uncommon enterprise needs
- Transparency and accountability for the buying team
- Trackable and archivable buying project history

#### Cons

- Time inefficiency
- Financial cost
- Sufficient knowledge and expertise on the buying team
- Increasing complexity in the buying project that leads to indecision

## Create a final assessment of solutions

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Your final assessment of solutions should include an evaluation of each of your preferred solutions against your solution requirements. Each solution requirement should be assessed, along with your buying teams confidence in the solution providers implementation methodology and timeline, their product roadmap and their customer references.

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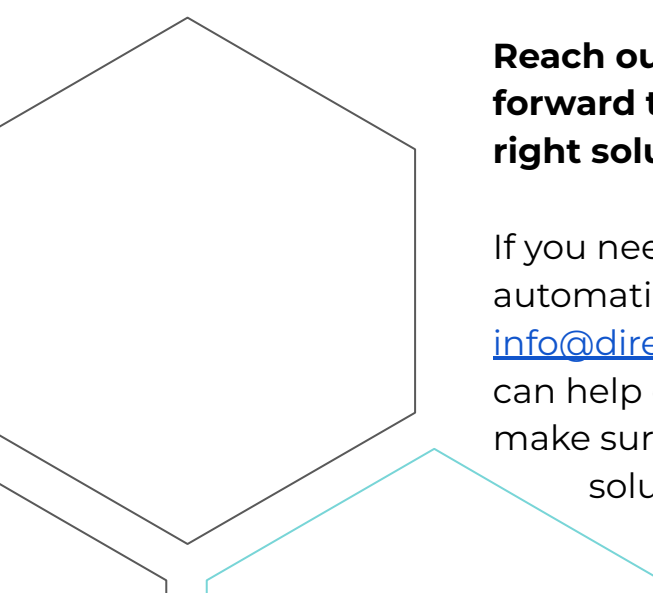
## Next Steps

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Your final assessment of solution providers, based on their ability to deliver the AP automation transformation critical to your business, is the final step before creating your financial business case.

**At Direct Commerce, based on more than twenty years of delivering measurable value to the world's largest companies, we work with companies like yours to assess the cost of your current process and understand the ROI of implementing transformational AP automation.**

**We work hard to understand your business problem, your current AP process and your solution requirements, and we work with you to create a business case that demonstrates the cost savings of transforming your AP process with Direct Commerce.**



**Reach out to us at [info@directcommerce.com](mailto:info@directcommerce.com). We look forward to partnering with you and helping you find the right solutions to transform your business.**

If you need outside expertise to help define your AP automation solution requirements reach out to us at [info@directcommerce.com](mailto:info@directcommerce.com). Our AP automation experts can help define requirements, help set your goals and make sure your buying team is on track to bring in the solution you need to take on your current challenges.

This guide to mapping your AP process is part of our [Enterprise Leader's Guide to Buying AP Automation](#) which will help you engage with the AP automation market, find the solution provider that's right for you, and build a business case for buying the right solution. If you're building a business case for buying new AP automation for your enterprise, make sure you're subscribed, and reach out to us at [info@directcommerce.com](mailto:info@directcommerce.com). We'll send you resources like:

- Writing a Strategic Business Problem Statement and Why It Matters That You Get It Right
- Mapping Your AP Process
- Defining Your Requirements for AP Automation
- Selecting Your AP Automation Provider

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## Value Delivered by Direct Commerce

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With end-to-end solutions for customers across industries, including retail, manufacturing, transportation, healthcare, and pharmaceuticals, Direct Commerce delivers industry-leading AP solutions that:

- Unify AP into one centralized, scalable environment
- Optimize team structure and focus
- Guide faster decision making
- Increase supplier satisfaction
- Accelerate time-to-close
- Ensure compliance and security
- Expand supplier payment strategies
- Drive revenue and improves cashflow
- Fast track ROI through best-in-class supplier onboarding