

Report

Accounting 2030: Forecasting the Next Frontier in AI-Powered Transformation

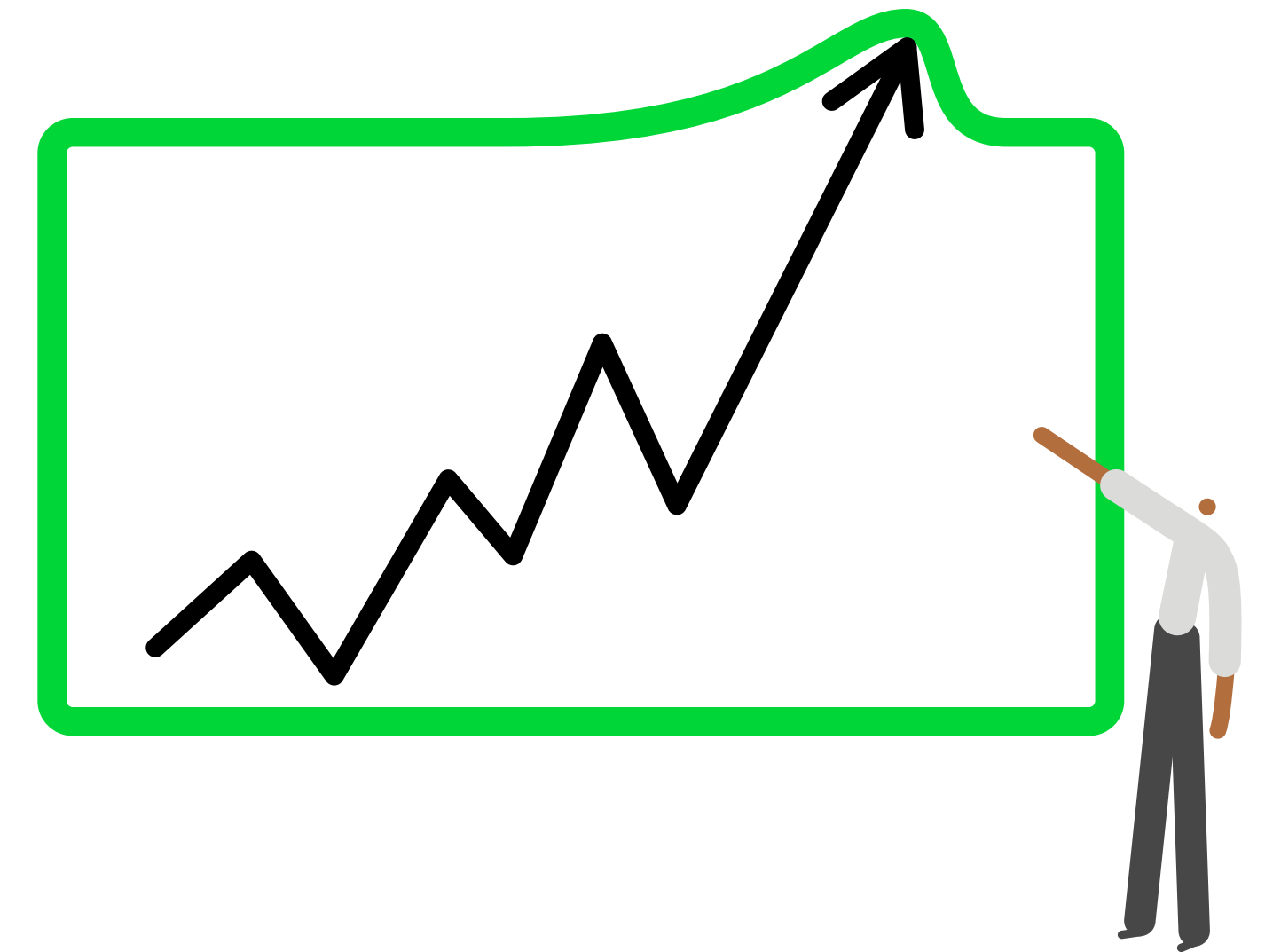
A global study on how AI is set to transform accounting for SMB finance leaders.

Sage



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Foreword by Aaron Harris, Chief Technology Officer, Sage

Technology resellers continue to **innovate and invest** in the future

Business accounting stands on the brink of a transformative era, driven by the rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI). As we look ahead to the future, AI is poised to redefine the role of accountants even further; shifting from the traditional, numerical tasks to becoming strategic advisors who drive business growth.

This evolution not only enhances efficiency but also unlocks unprecedented opportunities for businesses to gain deeper insights into their business to help leaders better understand their operations, improve decision-making, and maintain a competitive edge in an increasingly data-driven world.

This study, of over 2,300 finance and accounting decision makers in SMBs across the globe, suggests we can expect to see this trend accelerate. And, from the US to the UK, and Germany to South Africa, there is a consistent belief that, by 2030, steps will have been taken to ensure ethical management of AI – an important



development as the industry evolves at such speed. Accounting teams will also look to address employee resistance and uncertainty by involving them in the AI integration process to build trust and mitigate fears.

All signs point to AI having a positive impact on productivity across various tasks from data entry and anomaly detection to financial reporting. But different regions do differ on where AI's biggest impact could be felt. For instance, in the United States, there is a strong belief AI can streamline complex analytical tasks and enhance decision-making. Whereas, in Germany, there is a targeted expectation that AI will enhance precision and reliability.

The predictions serve as a big picture look at how AI will impact accounting in SMBs moving forward. By anticipating these changes and integrating AI into operations, businesses will gain confidence in their business and data, helping them to thrive in this new era. Imagine an accounting function that is more proactive, strategic, and integral to decision-making than ever before. This is the future we're envisioning: a world where businesses can stay at the forefront of innovation, driving industry standards and reaping the rewards of early adoption. The future of accounting is within reach, and it's poised to transform businesses in ways that are both exciting and unprecedented.

Research overview

This executive summary unveils the preliminary findings of a 2024 research study conducted by Forrester Consulting, commissioned by Sage, focusing on AI in SMB's accounting practices. Based on the responses to the study, Sage and Forrester have crafted five predictions for how the accounting industry could look by 2030.

Prediction 01

Accounting will usher in a new era of ethical AI leadership

The ethical use of AI will be non-negotiable by 2030, with more than 80% of SMBs adopting robust AI ethics policies.

Ethical governance of AI will become a hallmark of the leading SMBs who will set industry standards to ensure AI is used transparently and responsibly.

This means regular ethics audits and training will become an integral part of accounting best practices to maintain and improve the integrity of financial practices. This focus on managing the ethical implication of AI will also strengthen stakeholder trust in AI-enhanced financial reporting.

Spearheaded by the creation of formal ethics policies and training – 72% of respondents are planning to establish policies specific to AI use, and 71% are committed to conducting regular ethics training for AI users – ethical AI leadership will need to evolve alongside AI, with ethical considerations at the forefront of all technological advancements in AI in accounting.

72%

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71%

are committed to conducting regular ethics training for AI users



“Accuracy, and trust are at the heart of accounting. Without that, the business cannot rely on the reporting that is delivered. For us, that means making sure the AI solutions we use to enhance our practices meet strict ethical standards around bias, privacy, and transparency. Establishing accountability mechanisms in our team and working with AI partners that work to their own ethics guidelines is a priority for us.”

Andrew Dick

Chartered Accountant for G W Dick & Co LLP

Prediction 02

There will be a total overhaul of risk management

More than 90% of businesses will employ AI tools for continuous monitoring and anomaly detection by 2030. 67% anticipate AI will improve the efficiency of anomaly detection by at least 21%.

This will represent a reinvention in risk management within the accounting sector as AI is used to dramatically reduce incidents of financial errors and fraud by over 95% – and improve compliance while reinforcing trust in financial reporting. 67% of respondents envisage AI helping identify and mitigate risks more effectively to enhance the overall risk management framework.

Accounting firms that use AI tools for these purposes can expect to enhance security while simultaneously decreasing operational costs associated with risk management. This is because task automation will boost efficiency, and accurate monitoring and detection will occur at an unprecedented scale.

“AI isn’t here to replace us, it’s here to help us. It makes everything smoother, faster, and easier—like having an extra pair of hands that catch mistakes and free up time. With AI, we’re smarter with our resources, and that means we can lift everyone up together.”

Michael A. Smith
VP of Finance and Accounting,
Operation HOPE



>90%

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67%

of respondents envisage AI helping identify and mitigate risks more effectively to enhance the overall risk management framework



“With AI-powered tools, we’ve moved away from repetitive tasks and focused on more strategic work that drives real value for the organisation and our team. By cutting down on manual data entry, we’re free to pursue initiatives that strengthen our financial health and support our mission. Plus, with deeper insights, we’ve identified key areas to optimize, like reducing costs by balancing our staffing approach.”

Dennis Donovan
Controller, Nisbet Lodge

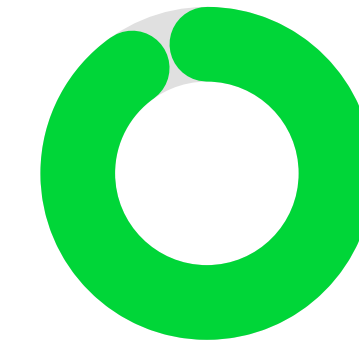
Prediction 03

The monthly close becomes a relic of the past

By 2030, 75% of businesses globally will have fully transitioned from the traditional monthly close to dynamic, continuous accounting practices.

This transformation will be driven by artificial intelligence, with 98% of respondents to the survey anticipating AI will improve monthly close accounting efficiency in the next five years, and 54% anticipating a boost of 20% or more. 53% of respondents either ‘Agree’ or ‘Strongly Agree’ AI will let them completely eliminate the monthly close.

By empowering SMBs with real-time financial insights and reporting, AI will eliminate the need for periodic closures. This shift to continuous accounting practices will allow businesses to free up time for employees and make faster, more informed decisions that enable the business to be more agile and responsive to market dynamics.



98%

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Prediction 04

Real-time data will fuel proactive decision-making

By 2030, over 70% of businesses will integrate real-time data streams into their financial decision-making processes.

This will mean that reliance on historical data alone for financial decision will become obsolete. With access to data on-demand and AI to process information in real-time, businesses will feel empowered to move beyond reactive strategies, enabling them to anticipate market shifts, mitigate risks, and seize opportunities as they emerge.

However, businesses will need to prioritise the quality of data to see its true impact and unlock the full potential of AI. This means making sure data that is consistently clean, well-integrated across systems and accessible.

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Dennis Donovan
Controller, Nisbet Lodge



Prediction 05

Accountants will welcome new opportunities to build expertise

By 2030, there will be a 50% reduction in the time accountants spend on routine tasks, allowing them to focus on strategic analysis and decision-making. Meanwhile, 43% of SMBs have increased hiring since adopting AI technologies, contradicting concerns around AI taking the jobs of human accountants.

As AI takes over routine tasks such as data entry, bookkeeping and compliance checks, accountants will be able to redirect their focus and time onto providing business insights and advisory services. 80% of respondents are experiencing, or expect to experience, more time to focus on problem-solving and strategic counsel, as a result of adopting AI into accounting.

By leveraging AI-driven insights to provide strategic guidance and consulting services, and taking advantage of time saved on traditional tasks, accountants will have more impact in shaping business strategies as a deeper integration of financial insights into broader business operations is fostered.

“Without the need to spend hours every month inputting data, our clients are seeing big benefits from us being able to spend more advisory time with them. Client satisfaction is our biggest KPI, so being able to move from being processors to business partners and offer them proactive advice is huge.”

Greg Houston

Associate Director, Infinity Partnership Limited

80%

expect to experience, more time to focus on problem-solving and strategic counsel, as a result of adopting AI into accounting

Conclusion

AI integration will come down to prioritising ethics and trust

This research shows there is a clear trend towards the adoption and integration of AI into accounting practices and indicates a readiness within the sector to move away from traditional processes and embrace new roles to drive business success.

Accounting – and accountants – will always be pivotal in this business success. But long-standing processes and responsibilities such as the monthly close and the need to process large amounts of complex data have presented significant challenges. Now, backed by AI, digital adoption presents an opportunity not only to tackle these obstacles but optimise operational efficiency, financial accuracy, and strategic decision-making with real breakthroughs possible by the end of the decade.

Whether that is through real-time access to financial data, the continuous assurance that data will be accurate and compliant, or enabling accountants to make faster, smarter, strategic-level decisions, the future of accounting appears set to benefit from the introduction of AI to enhance and elevate the work of humans.

The research shows that accounting teams have already taken important steps to making this a reality, and are seeing the positive impact of these steps in how they are able to go about daily activities and support the wider business. At Sage, we're also seeing customers and SMBs embrace the AI revolution through tools like Sage Copilot. Crucially, as AI continues to evolve, the accounting ecosystem appears ready to take responsibility for ensuring AI is used in an ethical manner.

A new era of accounting is dawning. The future of accounting is here. Ethical AI is driving a seismic shift, empowering strategic leadership in compliance, risk management, and beyond.



About Sage

Sage exists to knock down barriers so everyone can thrive, starting with the millions of SMBs served by us, our partners, and accountants. Customers trust our finance, HR, and payroll software to make work and money flow. By digitising business processes and relationships with customers, suppliers, employees, banks, and governments, our digital network connects SMBs, removing friction, and delivering insights.

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