

Automation planning guide

What does business process automation cost — and is it worth it?

Automation costs include setup and the work needed to keep the process running. Start with a defined workflow, the hands-on time it consumes, and the costs that will remain after the change.

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Latest version online: nex-ai.co/en/guides/business-automation-cost/

What belongs in the budget?

There is no single price for every workflow. Sending a form to a CRM differs from interpreting documents, waiting for approvals, and updating several systems. Ask for a breakdown that separates setup from ongoing costs.

Discovery and setup

Process mapping, integration checks, data preparation, workflow construction, testing, and handover. Check whether cleaning or migrating existing data is included.

Software and usage

The automation platform, API access in source systems, AI services, and hosting. Estimate typical volume and busier months.

Maintenance

Investigating failures, updating integrations, renewing access, and adapting to field changes. Define ownership, included work, and agreed response times.

Your team's time

Approvals, exceptions, quality checks, and training. The human work that remains belongs in the calculation.

What makes a workflow more expensive to build?

The number of systems tells only part of the story. Two integrations with consistent data may take less work than one system without a suitable interface. Before requesting a quote, check these points.

- Is a suitable API or connector available, and on which subscription plan?
- Is the data consistent, with an identifier that prevents duplicates?
- Which approvals, exceptions, and recovery paths must be supported?
- How many actions happen per case, and how many cases arrive each month?
- Which permissions, documentation, and tests are required before launch?

How do you compare software costs?

Providers use different billing units. Make presents plans based on credits; n8n presents paid plans based on workflow executions. Comparing entry prices alone, or assuming 1,000 customers equals 1,000 billable units, can be misleading.

Map a sample workflow and estimate its usage under the chosen provider's terms. Include retries and additional AI usage where applicable. Pricing changes: check allowances, overages, and monthly versus annual billing at the source before committing.

- [Make plans and billing units](#)
- [n8n plans and billing units](#)

A worked payback example

The following figures illustrate the calculation only. They are not NexAi prices, a quote, or client results. All amounts in this example are USD, excluding taxes and financing, with constant monthly volume assumed.

Suppose 400 cases arrive each month and each needs 8 minutes of hands-on work. After automation, an average of 3 minutes remains, including reviews and exceptions. Time released is $400 \times (8 - 3) \div 60 =$ approximately 33.3 hours per month.

At an assumed labor value of \$30 per hour, that capacity is worth \$1,000 per month. If ongoing software and maintenance cost \$250 per month, the estimated net monthly value is \$750. An assumed \$3,000 setup cost gives a calculated payback period of 4 months.

At only 200 cases per month, the labor value falls to \$500. If ongoing costs remain \$250, the payback period rises to 12 months. Test a low-volume scenario alongside your expected case.

Released capacity is not necessarily cash savings. If payroll stays the same, the value may be the ability to handle more work. Decide how that capacity will be used, and avoid counting the same time as both payroll savings and additional revenue.

The calculation

Estimated net monthly value = hours released × hourly value – additional monthly costs. Payback period = setup cost ÷ net monthly value.

When is this insufficient?

If net monthly value is not positive, these assumptions do not produce a positive payback period. Seasonality, quality changes, learning time, and changing volume can alter the result.

What should you measure during the pilot?

Choose a bounded workflow and cases that represent both routine work and exceptions. Measure before and after using the same method. Decide who approves expansion and what happens if acceptance criteria are not met.

- Hands-on time per case, including checks and corrections.
- Successful completion rate and duplicate or missing records.
- Elapsed time to completion, separate from human working time.
- Software usage cost per case and actual maintenance effort.
- The team's ability to operate manually and recover from failures.

A checklist before approving a proposal

Ask for clear project boundaries. This makes proposals easier to compare and exposes costs that may arrive after launch.

- The workflow, systems, and paths included in setup, plus exclusions.
- Test cases and acceptance criteria for handover.
- Account ownership, documentation, and access transfer to the team.
- Software and usage charges: who pays, and to whom.
- Maintenance, response times, and what counts as a separately scoped change.
- Responsibility for alerts, manual handling, and pausing the workflow.
- [How NexAi plans and implements business process automation](#)
- [Still choosing what to automate? Explore AI automation consulting](#)

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