# The AI-enabled accounting firm

## A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO VALUE, CAPACITY + RISK

**For firm leaders thinking through where AI creates value and where it creates risk.**

AI is changing how accounting work gets done. But the more important question is what your firm can become because of it. AI can shrink the time it takes to produce certain work. That creates an opportunity to rethink where your firm creates value, how you price services, where your people spend their time, and how you protect client trust. The firms that benefit most will be the ones that understand where AI creates value and where human judgment matters most.

## Start with the outcome, not the technology

It's tempting to start with the technology: What can it automate? Summarize? Generate? A better starting point is the outcome: **What are we actually creating for the client?**

As production gets faster, the work itself may become less differentiated. The value of human expertise becomes more concentrated around judgment, interpretation, context and trust. The technology matters because of what it makes possible for the client.

## 01 Where is AI creating capacity?

AI doesn't just automate tasks. It creates capacity. That might mean less time spent on production, research, data entry or administrative work. The real question is what you do with the time you get back. **The opportunity is to decide what becomes possible with that capacity.**

Could it mean more proactive client communication? More advisory conversations? Faster answers? New services? A better client experience? The value comes from putting that capacity toward work that matters more to the firm and its clients.

## 02 What are you actually selling?

As AI takes on more production, the link between time and value gets harder to defend. If a service takes half as long, does the client's outcome become half as valuable?

Pick one service and ask what the client actually values about it. Consider the outcome, the expertise behind it, and the difference your firm makes for the client. **What changes for the client because your firm is involved?** That answer may point to a different way to price, package or position the service.

## 03 What becomes more valuable as AI gets better?

As routine work gets automated, the value of human expertise becomes more concentrated. Think about the work that requires:

| JUDGMENT | INTERPRETATION | TRUST | ACCOUNTABILITY | CONTEXT |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowing what deserves attention and what doesn't. | Turning information into something a client can understand and act on. | Being the person a client calls when the answer isn't obvious. | Standing behind the work and its implications. | Understanding the business behind the numbers. |

If AI handled most of the routine work in your firm, what would you want your best people doing instead? Your answer can help reveal where the firm should invest next.

04

## Know where AI is being used

AI may already be showing up in your firm in ways leadership doesn't fully see. Employees may be experimenting with AI for research, drafting, analysis, client communications and other everyday tasks. That experimentation can create real value, but it also creates questions about how client information is handled and how AI-assisted work is reviewed.

A practical approach starts with visibility:

- **Know which tools** are being used.
- **Understand what information** is being entered.
- **Set clear expectations** for appropriate use.
- **Define how AI-assisted work should be reviewed.**
- **Establish who is accountable** for the final result.

**The goal is to give your people enough guidance to use AI confidently while maintaining the standards your clients expect.**

05

## Protect the thing AI can't replace

Your firm's greatest asset is **client trust**. Responsible adoption doesn't require a 50-page policy. Start with a few clear principles:

- **Know** where AI is used and what information goes into it.
- **Protect** client and firm data with tools that safeguard it appropriately.
- **Review** AI output as something to evaluate and validate.
- **Disclose** When appropriate, how AI is being used in client work.
- **Own** the outcome. AI can assist, while your firm remains accountable for the result.

## A quick gut check

**You don't need a perfect AI strategy today. You should be able to answer these questions confidently.**

| QUESTION | WE'RE THERE | WORKING ON IT | NOT SURE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Do we know where AI is already being used? | ☑ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Can we identify where AI could create more client value, including through greater efficiency? | ☑ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are our pricing and service models keeping pace with how the work is changing? | ☑ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Do our people know how to use AI responsibly with client information? | ☑ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Have we defined who reviews and owns AI-assisted work? | ☑ | ☐ | ☐ |

Look for the gaps. The questions you couldn't answer confidently may be the most useful ones. They can point to where your firm needs more visibility, clearer expectations or a different approach. You don't need to solve everything at once. Pick one gap and make it your next 90-day priority.

ACTION PLAN

## Your next 90 days

You don't need to predict where AI will be in five years. Focus on what your firm can learn and change next.

**01**

**FIND THE WORK.**
Identify where AI is already being used, formally or informally.

**02**

**FIND THE VALUE.**
Pick one service and ask what clients actually value about the outcome.

**03**

**FIND THE CAPACITY.**
Identify where AI frees up time and where that capacity could create the most value.

**04**

**FIND THE GAPS.**
Review your expectations around AI use, client data and accountability.

**05**

**FIND THE OPPORTUNITY.**
Choose one service or workflow to redesign around a better client outcome. Look for opportunities that improve the experience, expand the service or strengthen the relationship.

## The bigger question

AI may change how accounting work gets produced. Your firm still has an opportunity to increase the value it delivers. Imagine a firm where technology handles more of the production and your people spend more time creating the outcomes clients care about.

The strategic question becomes:

**How do we use AI to build a more valuable, more capable, more responsible firm?**

## Where to learn more

Want to go deeper on the risk side of AI adoption? Here are three practical resources:

**AI READINESS CHECKLIST** →

A practical checklist to help identify gaps in your firm's AI governance, policies and data protection.

**WHAT HAPPENS TO BUSINESS DATA INSIDE AI TOOLS** →

A straightforward breakdown at where business data goes, how it may be handled, and why AI usage creates new governance questions.

**THE REAL COST OF A BUSINESS AI INCIDENT** →

A closer look at the operational, financial and trust-related consequences when sensitive business data is exposed.

## Ready to think through what AI could mean for your firm?

Explore how Summit helps accounting firms adopt technology with performance, security and client trust in mind.