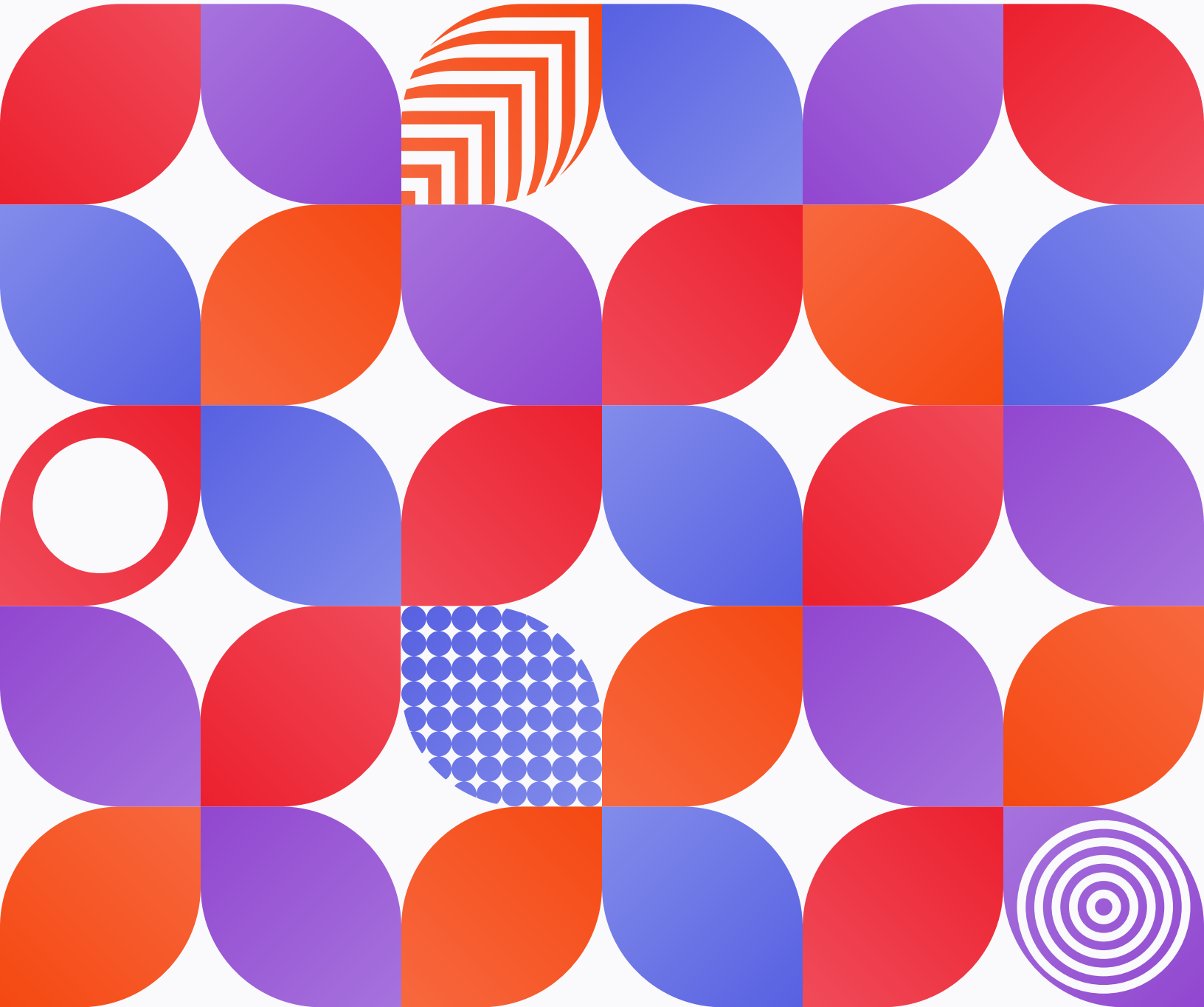


THE STATE OF AI IN DOCUMENT WORKFLOWS

Navigating the Gap Between AI Promises & Productivity

Real-world research, benchmarks, and insights to help organizations turn AI into measurable results.



About This Research

This research was conducted by Nitro in partnership with Zogby Analytics and Pollfish, surveying 239 C-suite executives and 1,100 managers and directors in April 2026 across the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. Industries surveyed: Financial Services, Legal Services, Manufacturing, Healthcare, and Real Estate. Separate surveys ensured independent responses from executive and manager/director populations, enabling a comprehensive analysis of perception gaps. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

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Survey Overview

With AI deployed in most organizations, why are **62%** of employees still losing 6 to 16+ hours every week to manual document work?

Nitro's independent research across more than 1,300 professionals—from managers and directors to the C-suite—benchmarks the state of document AI across industries and maps where the disconnect between promise and productivity is widest.

84%

of executives prioritize AI in document workflows. Only **54%** of managers and directors agree.

99%

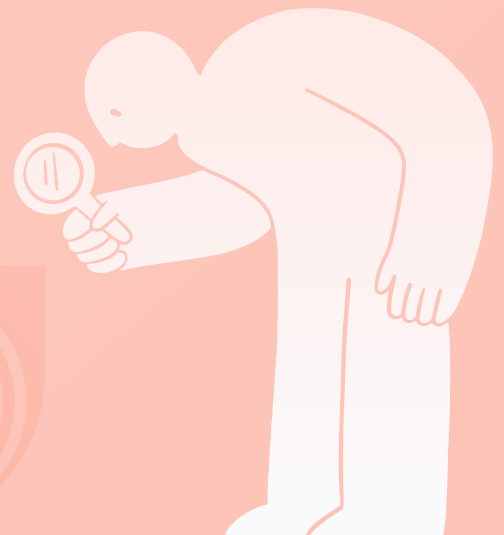
of executives and **93%** of managers report measurable outcomes where document AI is deployed.

12%

of teams have AI fully built into their document workflows, despite most reporting it as deployed.

AI itself is delivering. For organizations that have embedded it into their document workflows, the returns are measurable and real. The problem is the distance between where leadership believes AI has reached and where it has actually landed, and that gap is costing organizations more than they realize.

This report maps where those gaps exist, evaluates the state of document AI in organizations today, and reveals where the opportunities for real returns are hiding.





THE AI PERCEPTION GAP

Two Different Views of the Same AI

When organizations report that AI is deployed in their document workflows, the word “deployed” is doing a lot of work. For executives, it signals a strategic milestone. The resources are committed, tools in place, and returns expected. For the managers and directors running those workflows day to day, it often shows up as something far more fragmented—teams still pasting documents into ChatGPT, a process with only one or two connected steps, or a pilot that never quite took off.

That gap is more than a perception problem. It carries a real productivity cost and shows up in the data at every level, from how each group rates AI as a priority to how they describe what has actually been deployed, governed, and delivered.

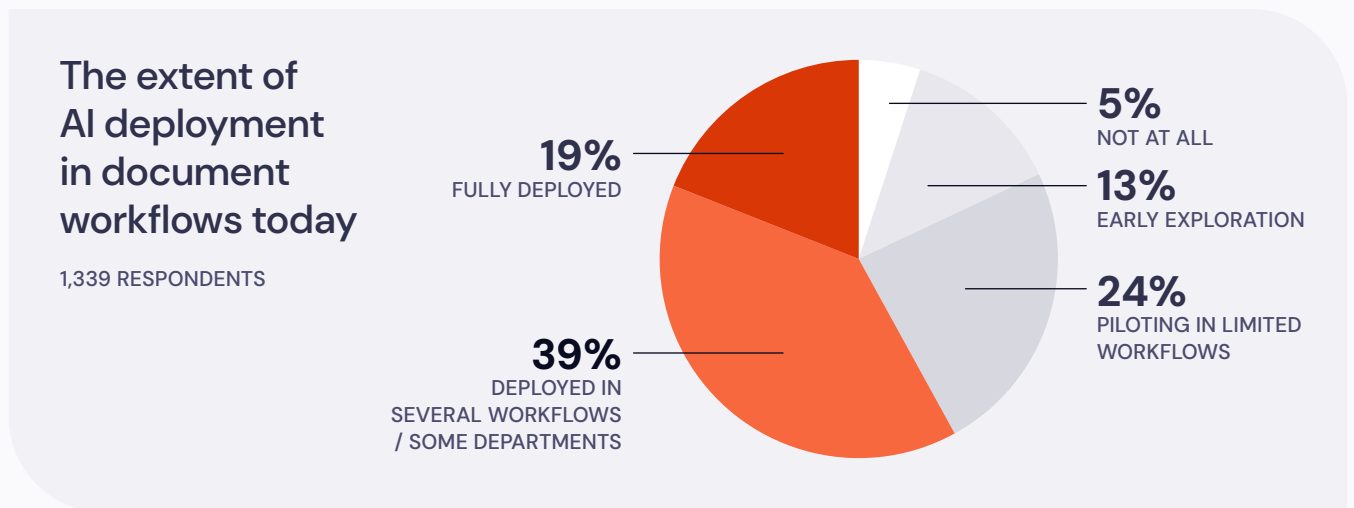
Executives call it critical. Managers aren't convinced yet.

84% of executives rate AI in document workflows a high or critical priority. Only **54%** of managers and directors agree. This 30-point gap is a fundamental signal of the disconnect throughout the survey.

Ask if AI in document workflows is deployed, and the gap widens

49% of executives say AI is fully deployed across their organization.
12% of managers say the same about their department.
85% of executives and **52%** of managers report AI in at least some workflows.

Executives describe an organization that’s arrived; managers describe one that’s barely started.



Managers (Departments)

Not at all	6%
Early exploration	15%
Piloting in limited workflows	27%
Deployed in several workflows / some departments	40%
Fully deployed	12%
<i>Total deployed (fully or some)</i>	<i>52%</i>

CXOs (Organization)

Not at all	2%
Early exploration	4%
Piloting in limited workflows	10%
Deployed in several workflows / some departments	36%
Fully deployed	49%
<i>Total deployed (fully or some)</i>	<i>85%</i>

“Deployed” rarely means what it sounds like

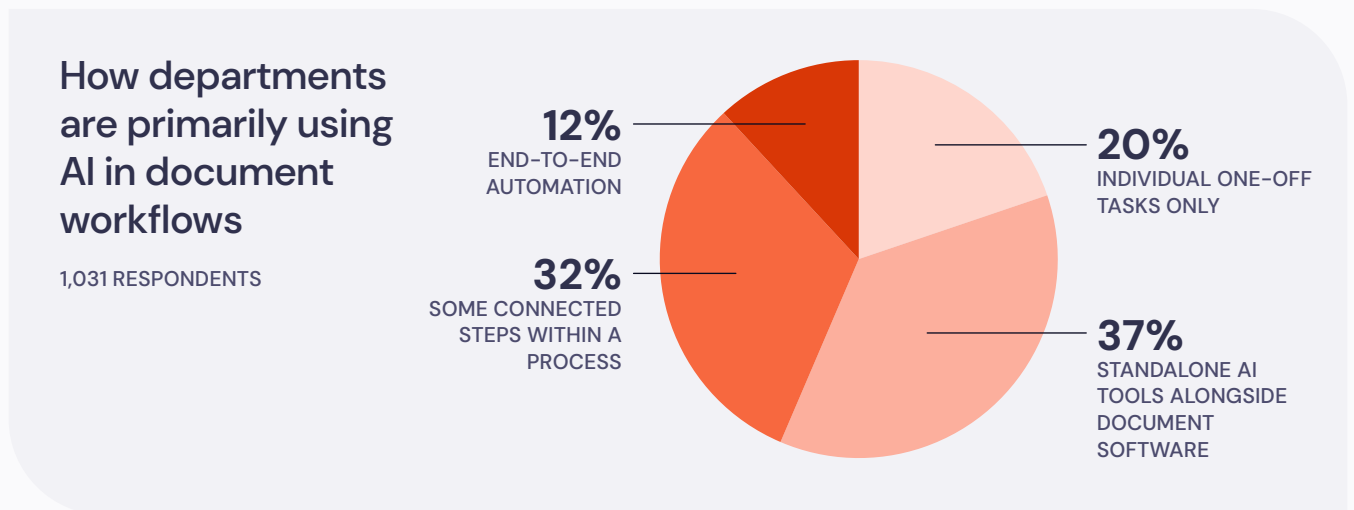
Among departments using AI in document workflows, most are doing so in siloed, ungoverned ways:

37% rely on standalone AI tools alongside their document software (pasting into ChatGPT, for example).

32% have connected some steps within a process.

20% use AI for individual one-off tasks only.

12% have reached end-to-end automation.



Only one in eight teams has reached meaningful, end-to-end document automation. The rest are working *around* their document tools, not through them. The shadow AI the C-suite worries about is hiding inside the teams that already report themselves as deployed.

COUNTING THE COST

The Hidden Cost of Manual Work

AI strategy dominates the conversation, but there's a more immediate cost most organizations aren't measuring: the hours employees spend every week doing document work by hand. Manual document tasks rarely appear as a budget line. They happen in minutes, scattered across the day, invisible to any dashboard—and they add up fast.

On this point, executives and managers tell the same story. The time lost to manual document work is real, and it's more than most organizations have accounted for.

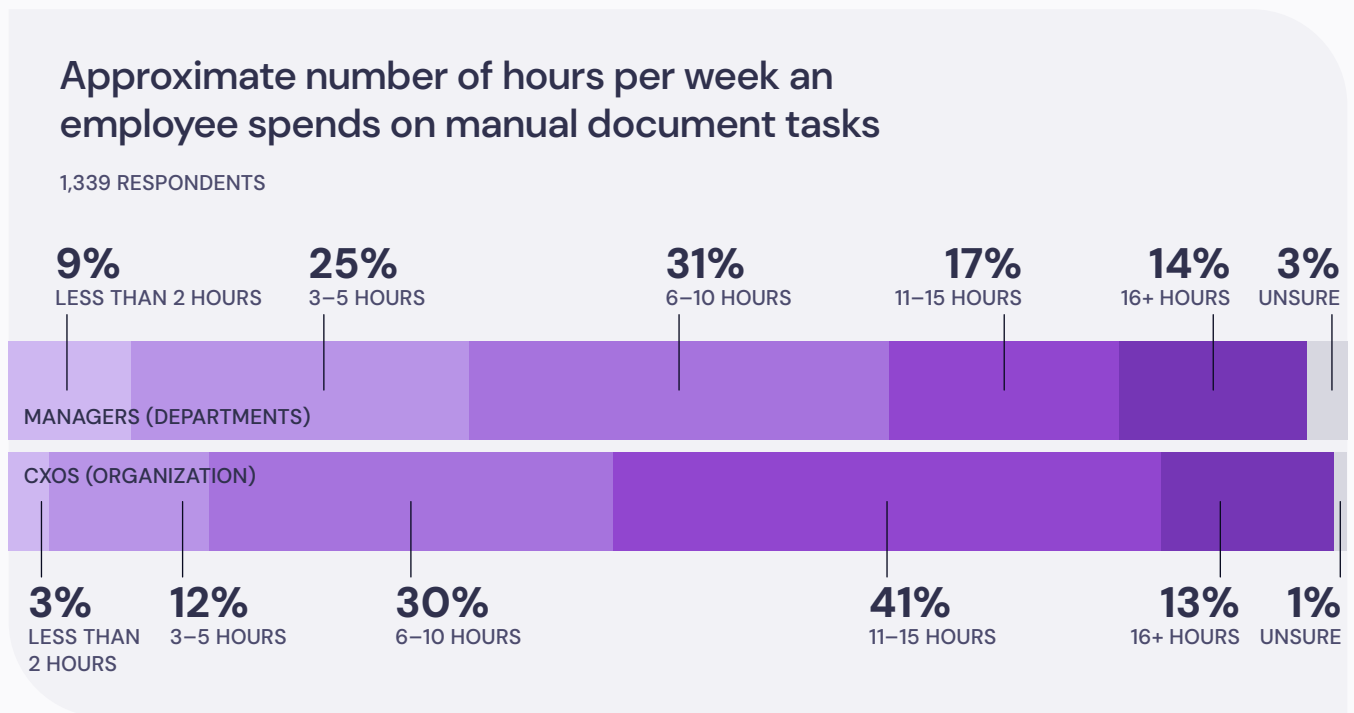


More than half a working day is lost every week

62% of managers say employees in their department spend 6+ hours a week on manual document tasks: editing, converting, merging, extracting, and redacting.

31% put it at 11+ hours—close to a third of a working week.

Executives see the problem at even greater organizational scale: **41%** place it in the 11–15 hours per week range.



Managers (Departments)

Less than 2 hours	9%
3–5 hours	25%
6–10 hours	31%
11–15 hours	17%
16+ hours	14%
I’m not sure	3%

CXOs (Organization)

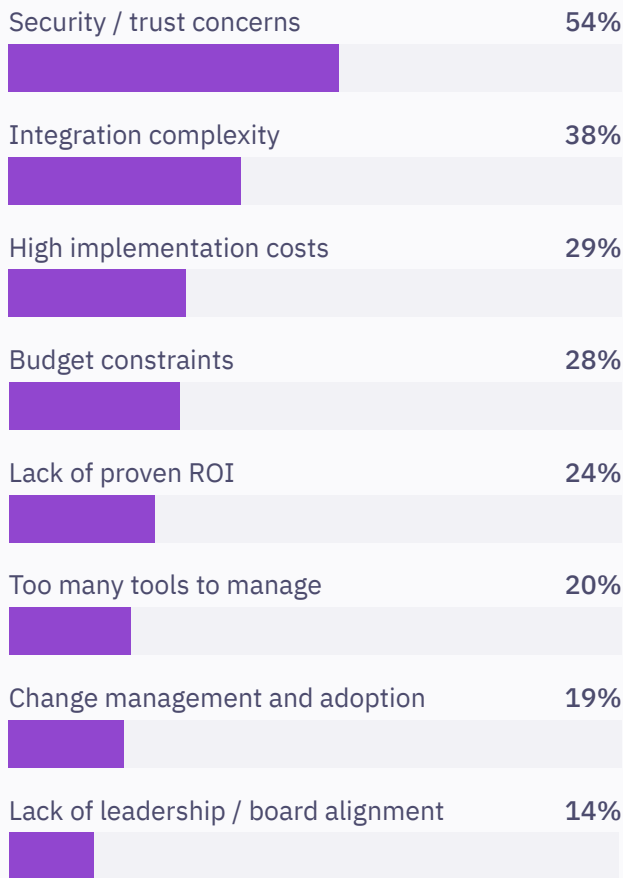
Less than 2 hours	3%
3–5 hours	12%
6–10 hours	30%
11–15 hours	41%
16+ hours	13%
I’m not sure	1%

Security concerns are stalling deployment at every level

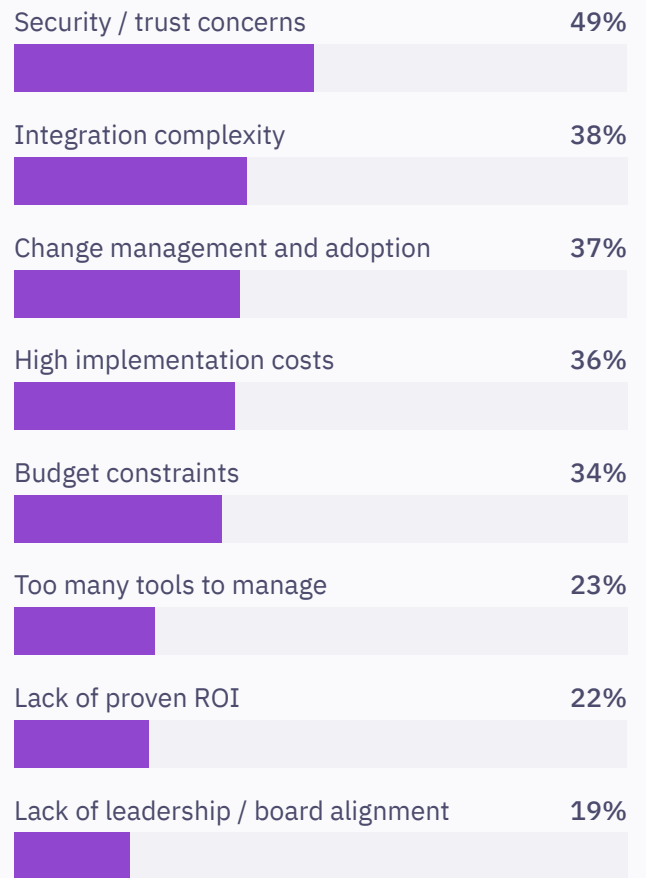
Top barriers to deploying AI in document workflows

1,339 RESPONDENTS (TOP 3 SELECTED)

Managers (Departments)



CXOs (Organization)



Security tops the list for both audiences, but the sharpest split is change management. Leadership is far more worried about getting the organization to adopt AI than the frontline is about using it.



“Deploying AI may seem like the easy part in 2026. Delivering time and cost savings securely at scale is the struggle. When 96% of companies still manage documents and workflows manually, their employees lose a day or more of productivity every week. It’s because most investment has been in general-purpose AI tools that aren’t built to handle the complex document processing, workflows, and work surfaces of today’s modern business environment.”

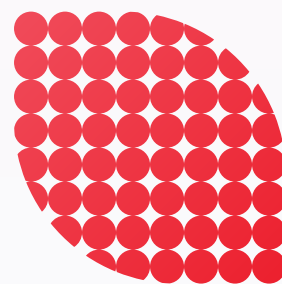
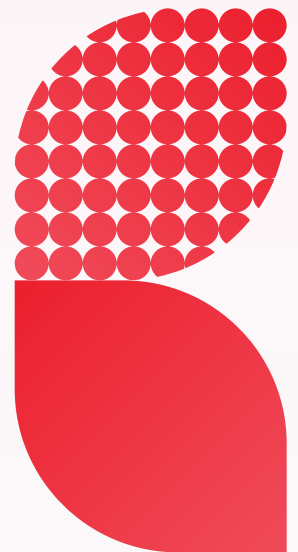
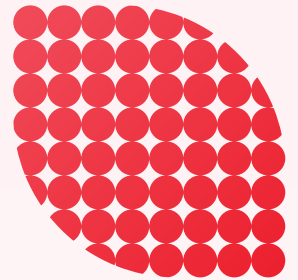
CORMAC WHELAN
CEO, NITRO

TOOL SPRAWL

Document Tools: Where Less is More

Even when organizations invest plenty in AI, productivity gains can stall for a simpler reason—too many tools. A single document might be drafted in one application, converted in a second, signed in a third, and archived in a fourth. Each tool comes with its own license, login, and learning curve. No one planned it that way. Most document stacks were created one reasonable use case at a time.

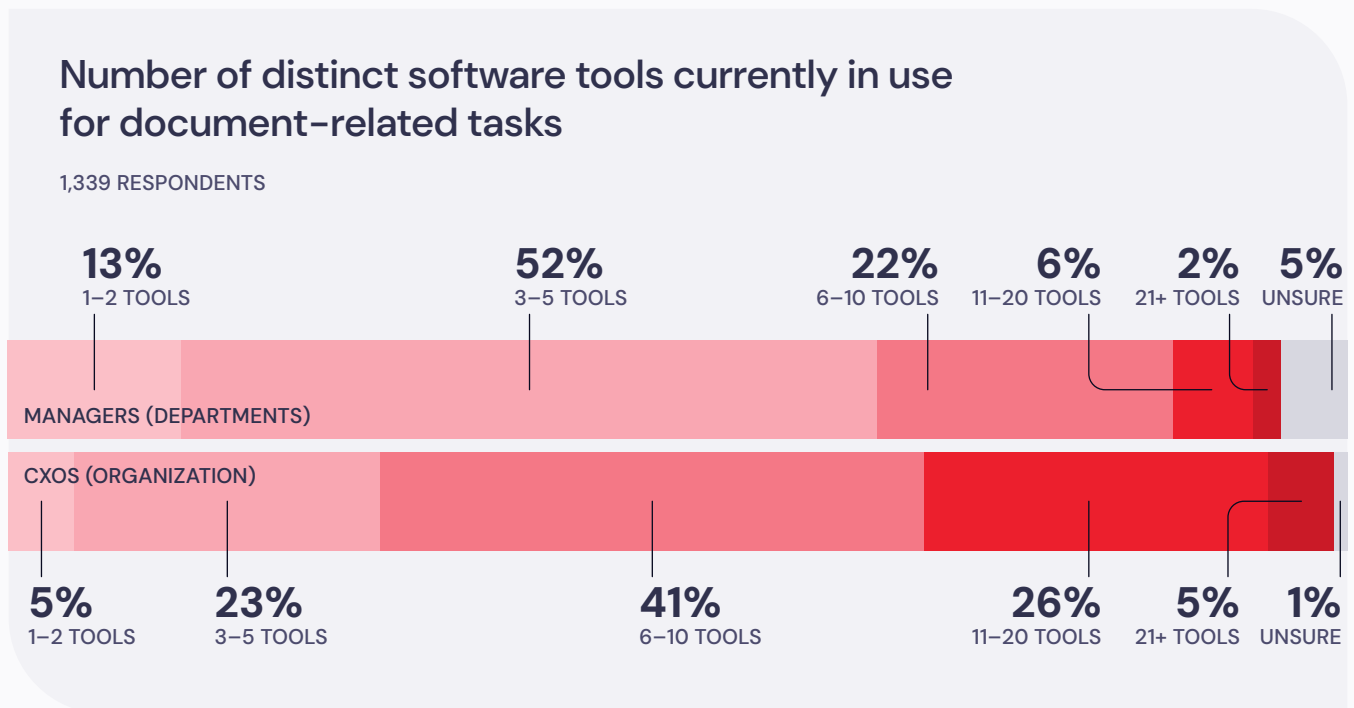
The data reveals that leadership and the frontline see the tool sprawl problem differently, but they all want the same thing.



The C-suite sees a messier stack than the frontline does

72% of executives report that their organizations run 6+ separate document tools, compared with **30%** of managers describing their department.

Managers see their corner of the stack while executives see the whole sprawl, but both viewpoints point to real tool fragmentation.



Nearly everyone wants the same fix

95% of executives say their organization is actively evaluating or planning to consolidate its document tool stack within 12 months.

74% of managers say the same for their department.

The push to consolidate has reached almost every level of the organization.



SECURITY & THE DOCUMENT BLIND SPOT

Concern is High, Governance is Low, and Behavior Hasn't Changed

Security is the reason most leadership teams cite for moving slowly on document AI. Most have concerns. Fewer have enforced policies. And fewer still have changed the daily behavior those policies were designed to address.

The result is a blind spot hiding in plain sight. Sensitive documents are moving through unmanaged AI tools right now in departments that leadership believes are governed.

The pattern unfolds in three stages: concern, policy, and behavior—and each one falls further behind the last.

STAGE ONE

The concern is there

Of all the risks AI introduces, sensitive documents moving through unvetted tools is the one that worries leadership most.



56%

of executives report feeling very or extremely concerned about the security risks of employees using AI on sensitive documents.

37%

of managers report feeling very or extremely concerned about the security risks of employees using AI on sensitive documents.

STAGE TWO

But policy hasn't kept pace with concern

Concern at that level should produce rules. But ask whether anything formal actually governs how employees use AI on confidential documents, and the two audiences describe completely different companies.

Leadership believes the guardrails are up, but the people closest to the documents say otherwise.

71%

of executives report a clear, actively enforced policy, while **29%** report that it's inconsistent, in development, absent, or are unsure.

43%

of managers report a clear, actively enforced policy, while **57%** report that it's inconsistent, in development, absent, or are unsure.

STAGE THREE

Behavior hasn't changed either way

Regardless of policy, the documents are moving anyway. Sensitive and confidential material is flowing through consumer tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini, and at many organizations it has become routine.

Concern hasn't become governance, and governance hasn't changed behavior.

74%

of executives confirm that employees have used consumer AI tools on sensitive or confidential documents—**41%** saying it's happening regularly.

55%

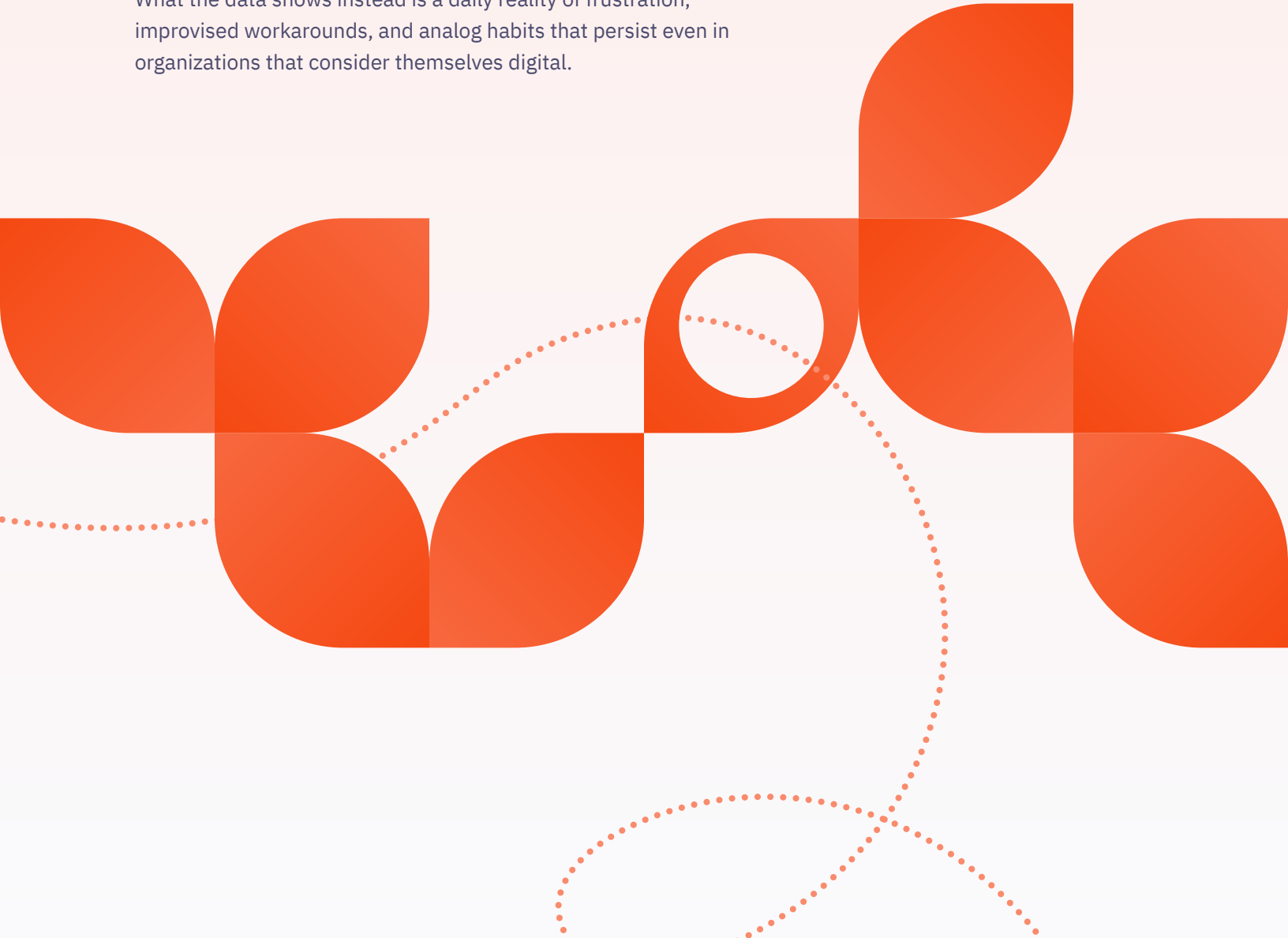
of managers confirm that employees have used consumer AI tools on sensitive or confidential documents—**27%** saying it's happening regularly.

KNOWLEDGE WORKERS IN 2026

Frustration, Workarounds, and the Habit That Won't Go Away

Behind every deployment stat is someone just trying to edit and merge three files before end of day. These are the people document tools are supposed to be helping.

What the data shows instead is a daily reality of frustration, improvised workarounds, and analog habits that persist even in organizations that consider themselves digital.



Bad document tools lead to strong opinions

More than half of knowledge workers (**57%**) say a PDF or signing tool has, at some point, made them want to take drastic measures:

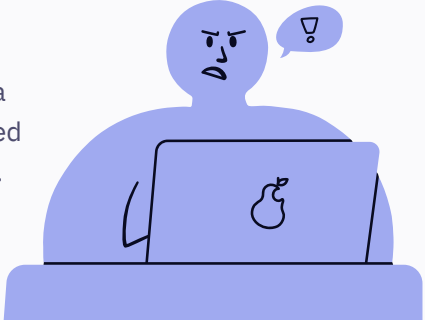
32%

want to throw their laptop out a window.



21%

want to write a strongly worded message to IT.



19%

genuinely reconsider their career path.



10%

want to quit their job on the spot.



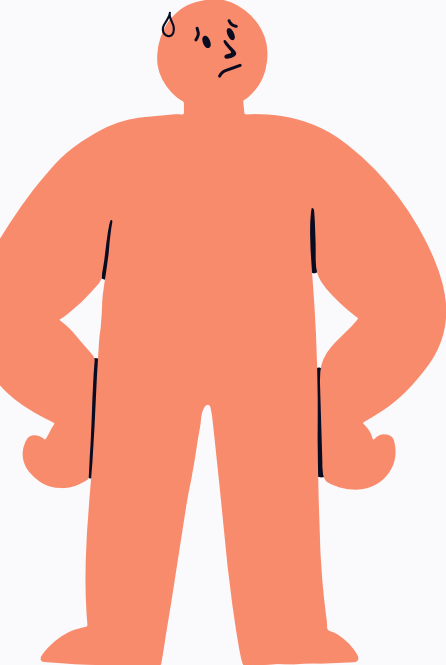
Leadership knows the frustration is costing them

On a serious note, **49%** of executives rate employee frustration with document and signing tools as a significant or major issue affecting morale and productivity across their organization.

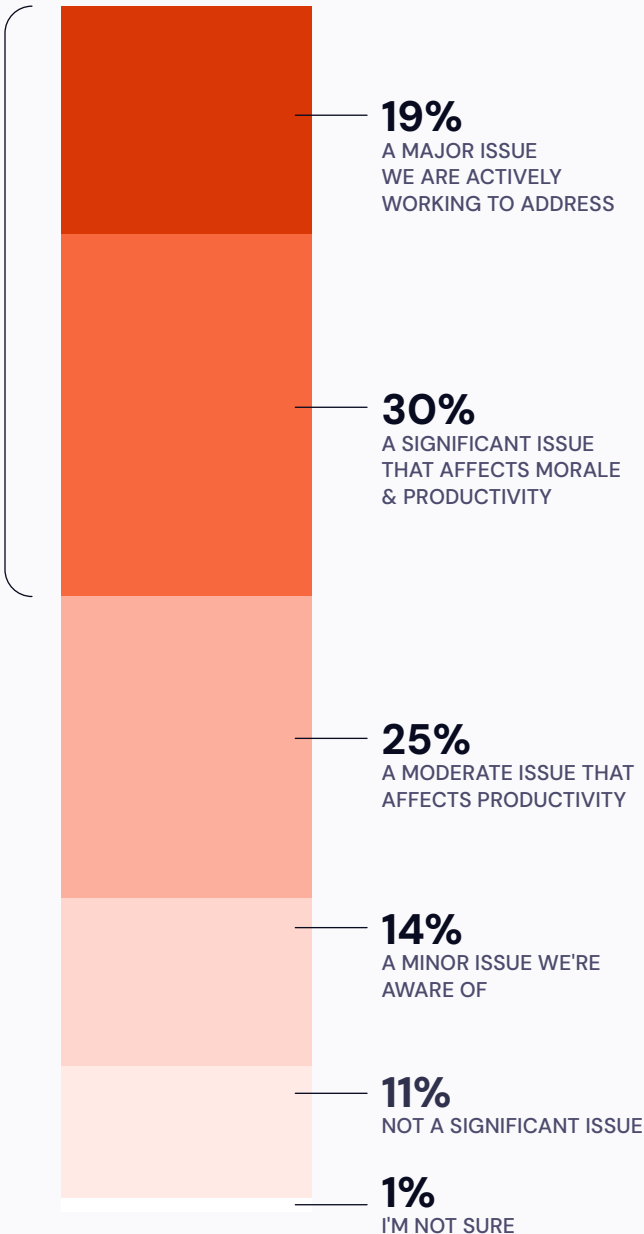
Only **11%** dismiss it as not significant.

How significant employee frustration with document tools is as an organizational issue

239 RESPONDENTS (CXOS ONLY)



49%
TOTAL REPORTING
ISSUE IS SIGNIFICANT
OR MAJOR



19%
A MAJOR ISSUE
WE ARE ACTIVELY
WORKING TO ADDRESS

30%
A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE
THAT AFFECTS MORALE
& PRODUCTIVITY

25%
A MODERATE ISSUE THAT
AFFECTS PRODUCTIVITY

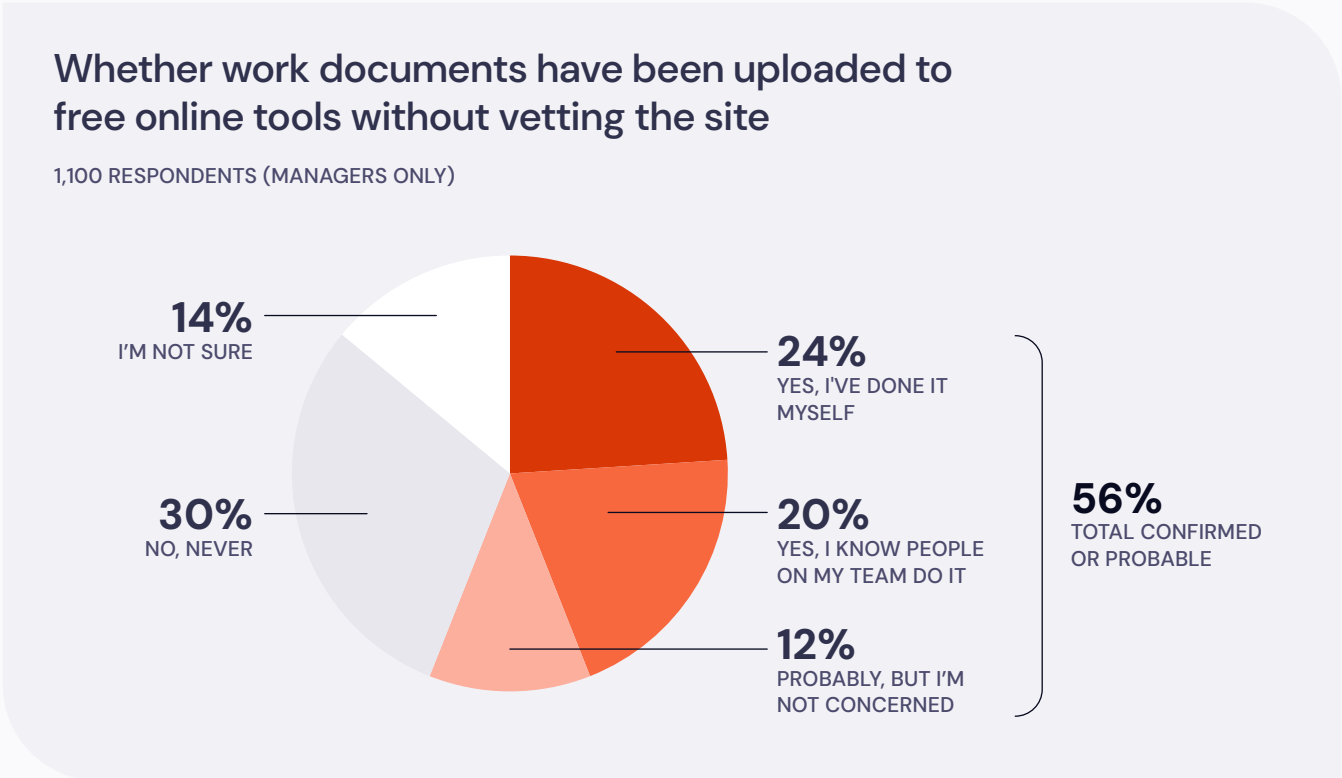
14%
A MINOR ISSUE WE'RE
AWARE OF

11%
NOT A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE

1%
I'M NOT SURE

Desperation has a destination: Free online tools

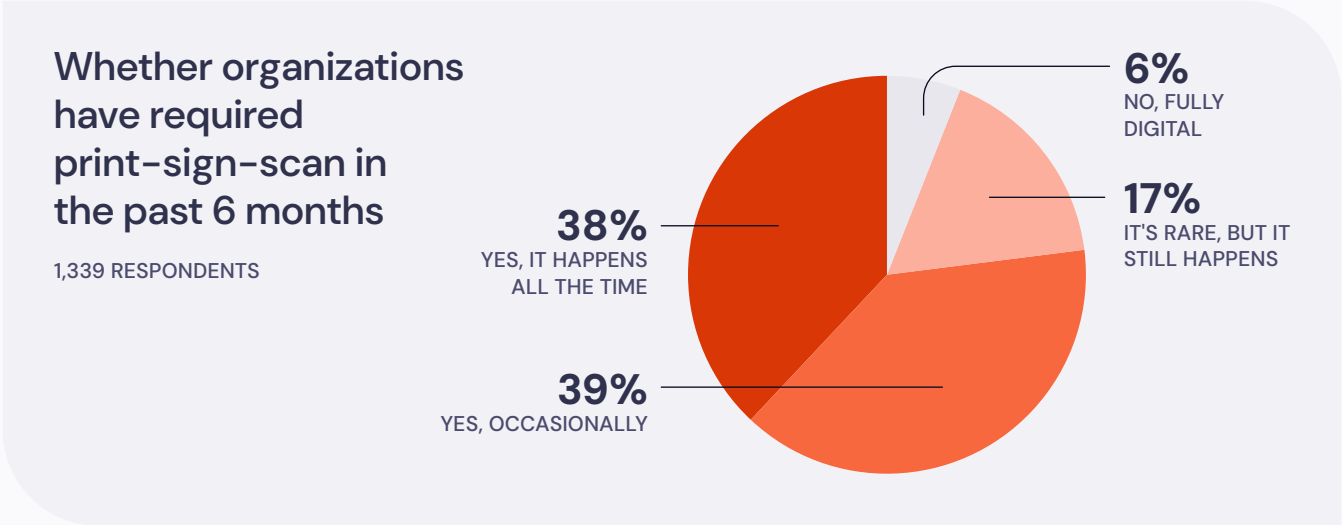
44% of managers confirm, personally or through direct team knowledge, that work documents have been uploaded to free online tools without checking who runs the site.



The most analog habit refuses to disappear

In the past six months, nearly every organization still made employees print a document, sign it by hand, scan it, and email it back.

96% of executives and **94%** of managers say it happened. Only **5-6%** report being fully digital.



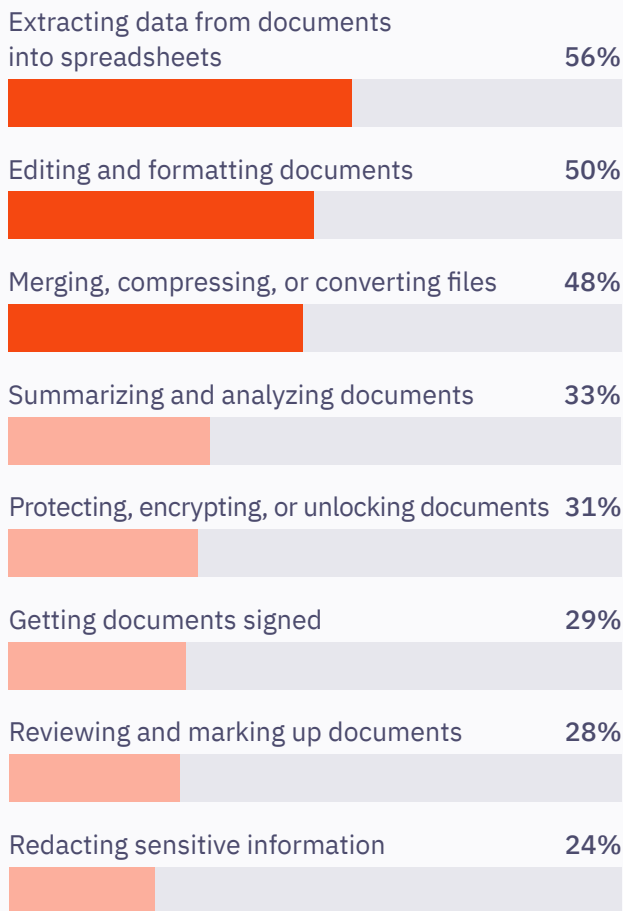
The document tasks leaders most want to automate

When asked what three work tasks they would be most excited to never do manually again, managers put the repetitive mechanics of document work at the top.

And executives are aligned on the top automation opportunity for the organization.

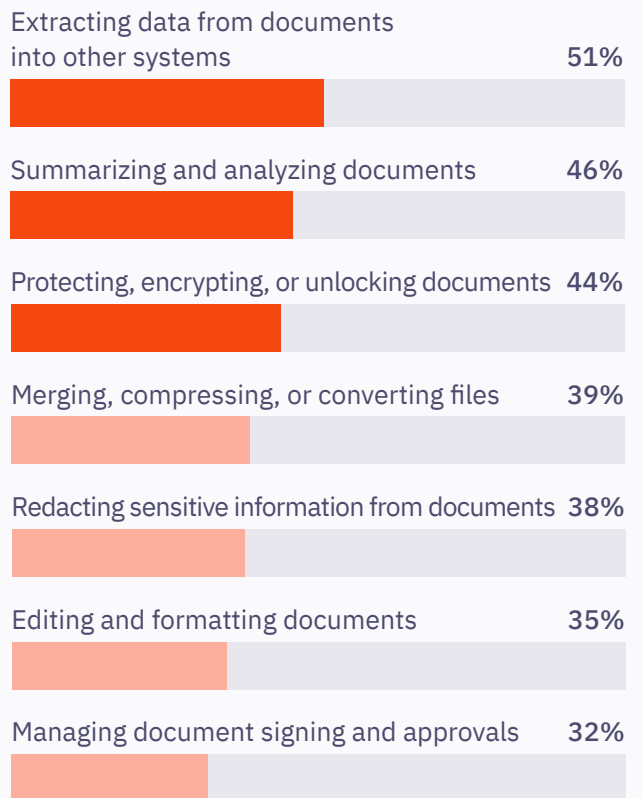
The tasks workers most want to stop doing manually

1,100 RESPONDENTS



Where executives see opportunity for document automation

239 RESPONDENTS



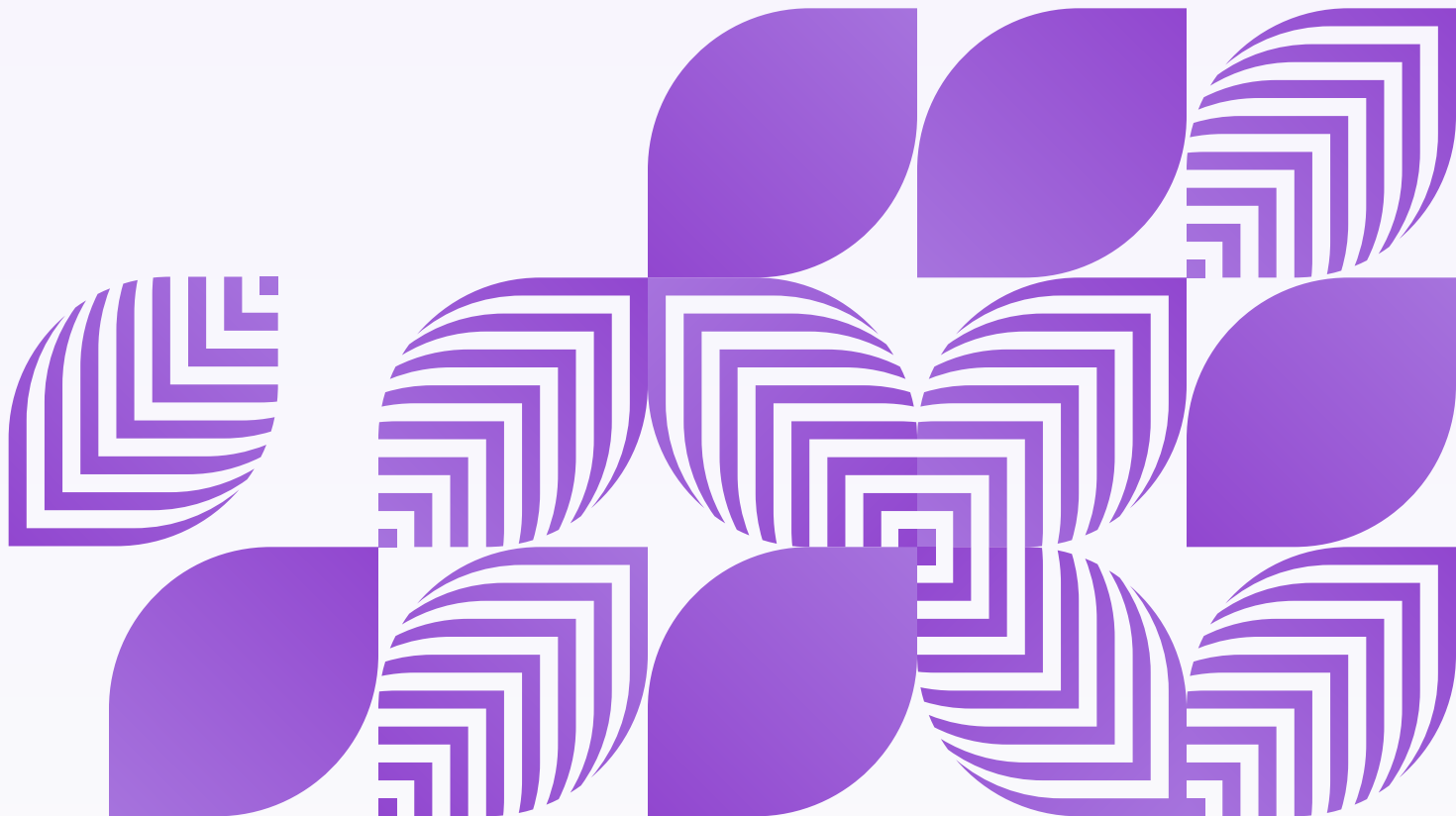
THE PROOF POINT

Document AI: Where Promises Turn Into Productivity

The frustration, the workarounds, the crowded tool stacks all point to the same question: what changes when AI is actually built in?

The answer is a workday with fewer of the manual steps that have defined document work until now.

But both audiences say the same thing before they commit: show me it works.



Where document AI is deployed, the returns are real

The proof both audiences are asking for is already here—**99%** of executives and **93%** of managers and directors in organizations where document AI is embedded report at least one measurable outcome.

Outcomes since deploying AI in document workflows

1,093 RESPONDENTS

Managers (Departments)



CXOs (Organization)



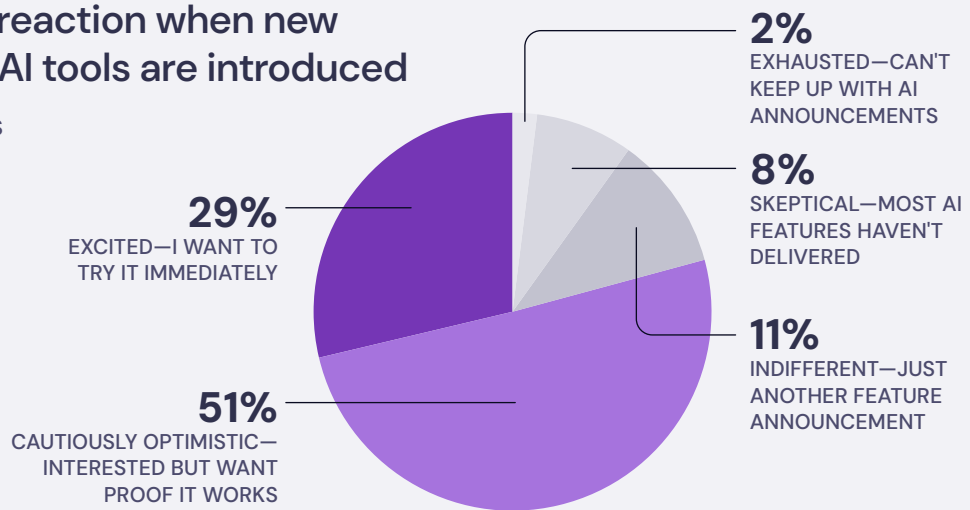
The returns on document AI are proven. What separates the organizations seeing measurable productivity gains from the ones still waiting isn't belief or budget. It's how far AI has made it into their daily workflows.

What both sides need before they act

Proof is the price of entry for document AI at every level. Managers want to see a new tool work before they trust it, and executives put demonstrated results ahead of any other factor, cost included.

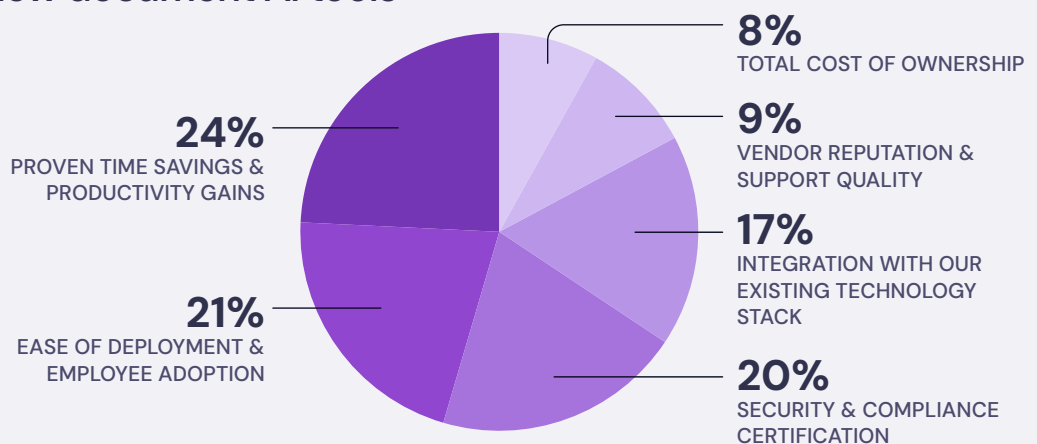
Managers' reaction when new document AI tools are introduced

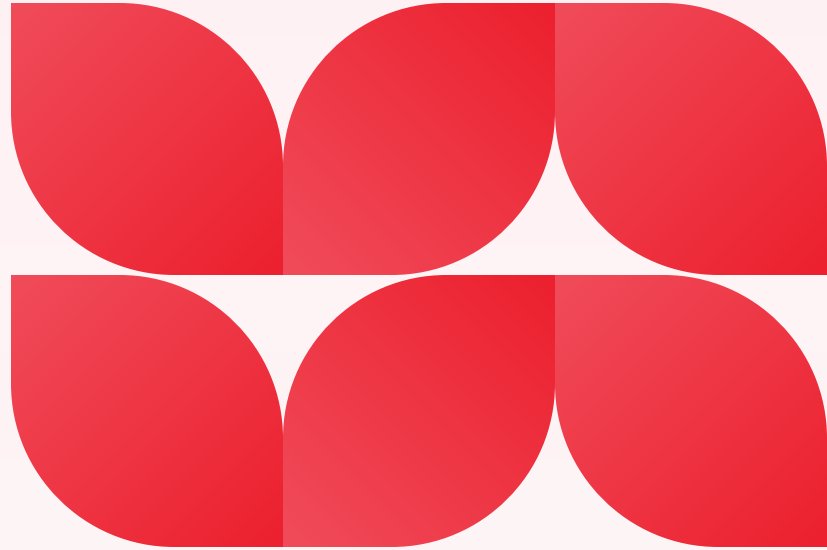
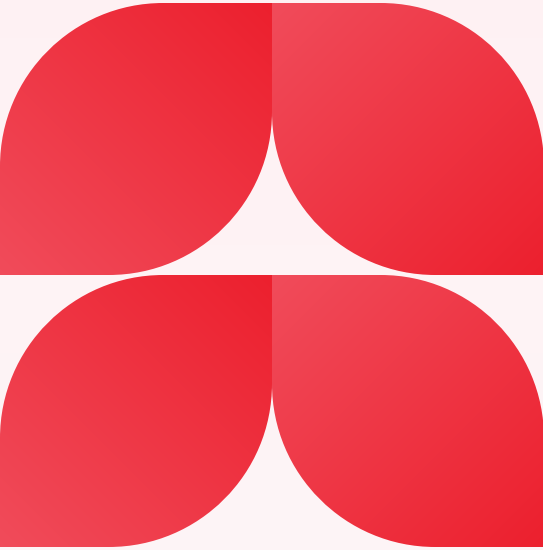
1,100 RESPONDENTS



Executives' most important factors when evaluating new document AI tools

239 RESPONDENTS





THE DECISION POINT

What It Takes to Switch Document Vendors

The lost hours, the crowded stack, the security stalemate—all of it adds up to a market in motion. Nearly every executive surveyed says their organization is evaluating or planning to consolidate its document tools within the year. What drives that decision depends entirely on who is being asked.

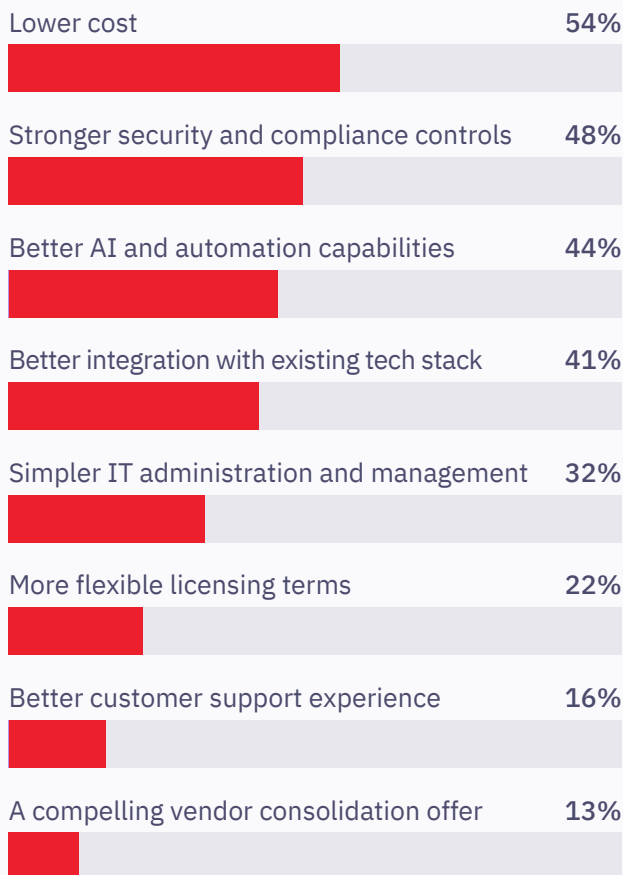
Executives will switch for better AI. Price didn't even make the top three.

Asked what it would take to leave their current document tool vendor(s), and executives and managers hand over different lists.

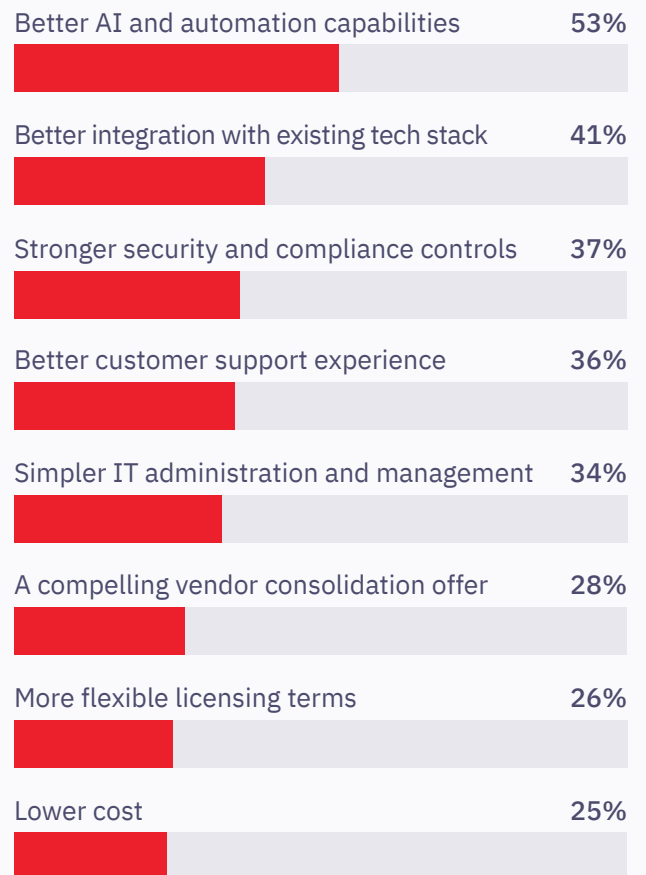
Reasons respondents would switch document vendors

1,339 RESPONDENTS (TOP 3 SELECTED)

Managers (Departments)



CXOs (Organization)



Lower cost came in last for executives, showing that buying decisions are based on better capabilities, not a better deal. But for managers and directors facing budget pressure, cost is the primary lever for switching vendors.

Incumbents are already losing to AI

At the organizational level, third-party AI tools have already taken a measurable share of document tasks:



13%

Summarization and analysis



7%

Data extraction



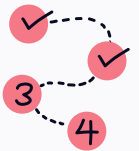
10%

Language translation



6%

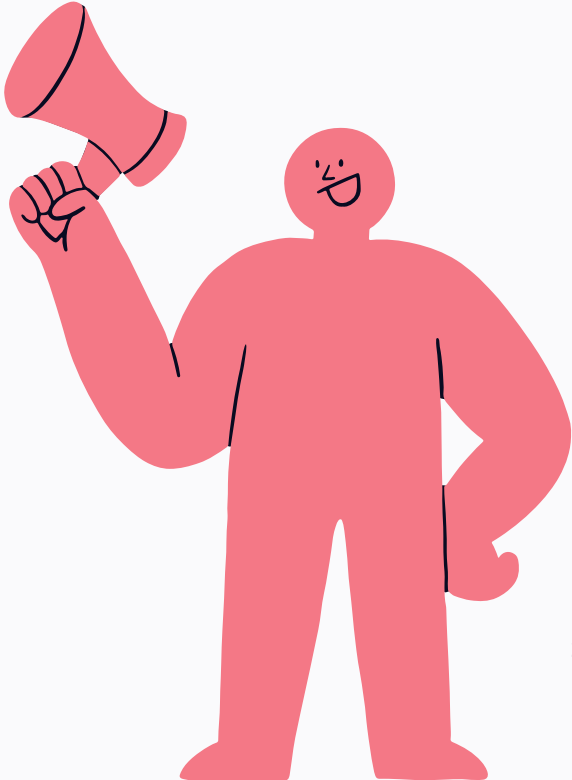
Document search



8%

Workflow automation

When incumbents don't deliver AI inside their own products, people go elsewhere to get it, one task at a time.



THE TAKEAWAY

The Gap is Closeable

The data across every section of this report tells a consistent story. Leadership believes AI is further along than it is. Managers and directors closest to the work know it isn't. And the distance between those two views is where productivity is stuck—manual document tasks that haven't changed in decades, fragmented tool stacks nobody designed, governance on paper but not in practice, and AI investment that hasn't made it far enough into the daily work to show up in results.

The same data points to something equally clear. Where organizations have embedded AI into the document workflows people use every day, the returns are real, measurable, and consistent across every metric that matters.

The question is no longer whether document AI works. The gap sits between having an AI strategy and actually delivering results where teams need it most.

“Adding AI is not the sole answer. It should be part of a bigger strategic shift. To see lasting gains, organizations need automation and AI built into the workflows and systems people already use every day.”

CORMAC WHELAN
CEO, NITRO



Start where the proof already exists

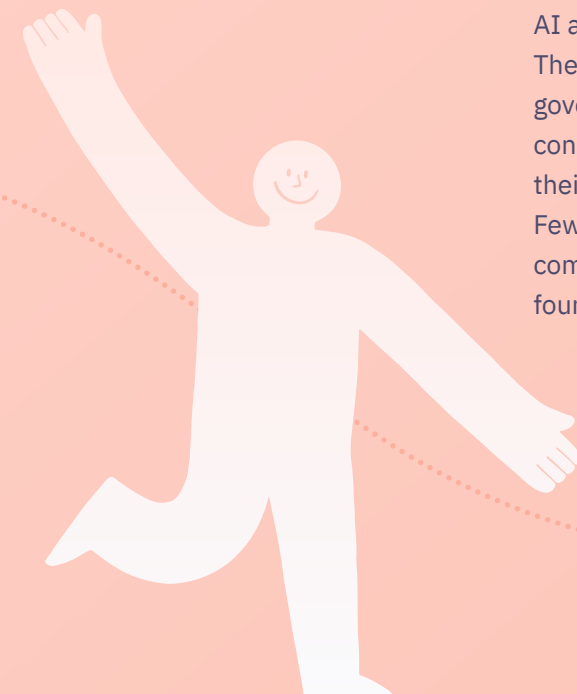
Data extraction, file manipulation, and document processing top the list of what workers want to stop doing manually, and they're the same tasks already delivering measurable returns. Starting here creates visible wins fast and builds the organizational confidence that cautious frontline teams are waiting for before they fully commit.

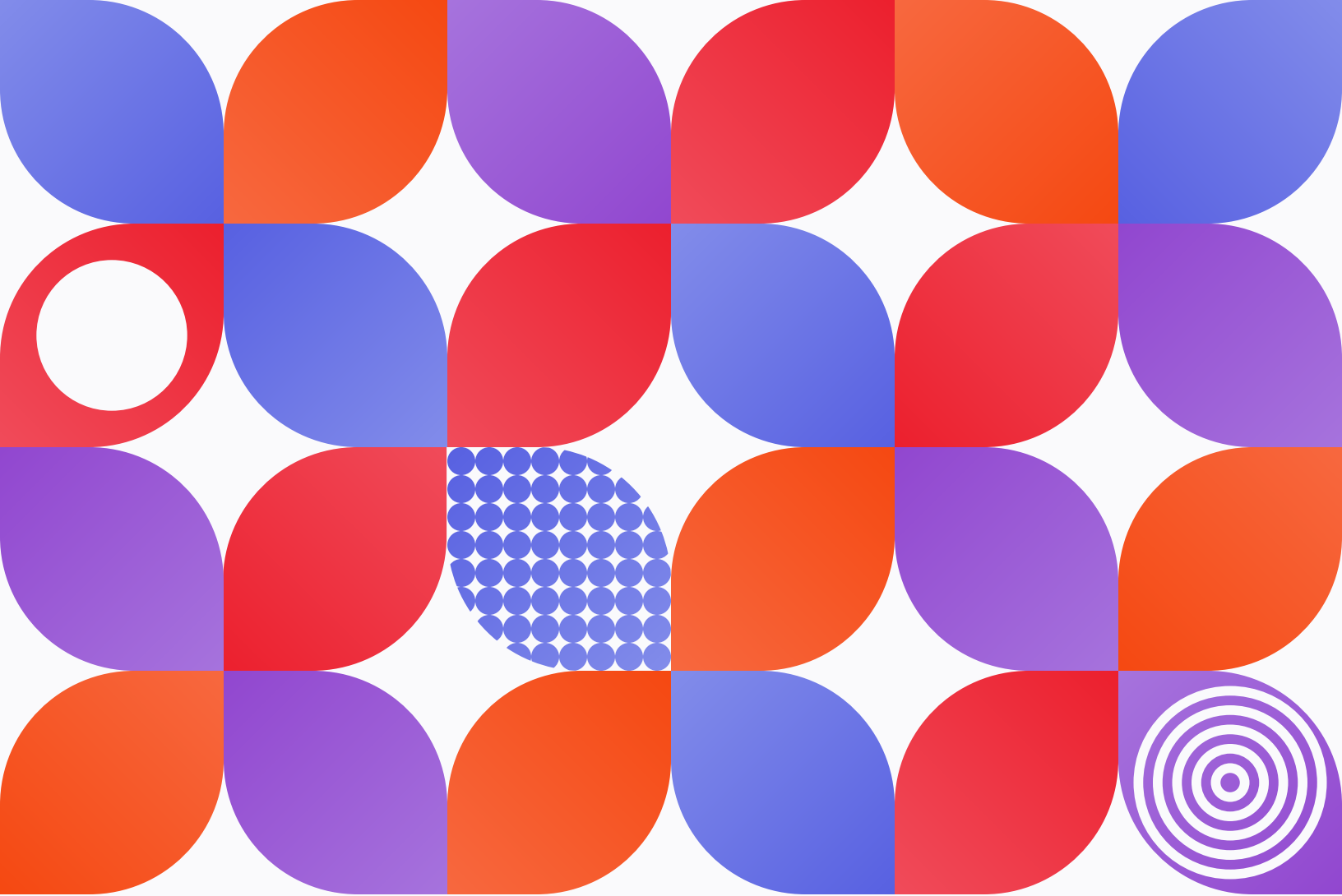
Build governance into the workflow, not around it

Security concerns around AI are high across every level of leadership. Enforcement is not. Organizations closing the governance gap aren't adding more policy—they're choosing tools with compliance and security built in natively, so the safe path and the easy path are the same path.

Consolidate with intention

AI adoption moved fast and tool stacks grew with it. The fragmentation this report surfaces—across tools, governance, security, and adoption—is a natural consequence. With 95% of executives already evaluating their document stack, the moment to simplify is now. Fewer, more capable document solutions can reduce complexity, close governance gaps, and create the foundation for AI to deliver on its promise.





Nitro powers the document workflows organizations depend on, bringing PDF, eSign, and intelligent document automation solutions together in one platform. From everyday document tasks to AI-assisted work like data extraction, summarization, and redaction, Nitro helps teams move faster while keeping sensitive information protected.

Based across North America, Europe, and Australia, Nitro proudly supports millions of customers worldwide and 67% of the Fortune 500.

Visit us at GoNitro.com.