Cherry Place AI
FIELD NOTES

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Five places AI is paying off in professional services firms right now.

Accounting, consulting and advisory firms have moved past asking whether to use AI. The useful question is which jobs pay back first. Here are the five with the strongest evidence, the time each one puts back on the table, how hard each is to set up, and where firms get stuck.

By **TJ Ryan**, Founder · Head of AI Transformation 8 minute read Every number linked to its source

4 in 10

professionals say their organization now uses generative AI, up from 22% a year earlier.[1]

74%

of professionals use AI tools several times a week.[2]

18%

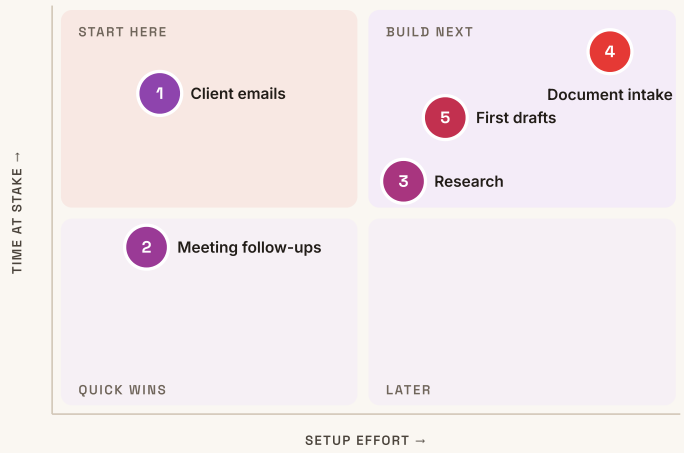
say their organization measures what AI pays back. Most firms are using it without counting the return.[1]

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WHERE TO START

Payback against setup effort.

All five are worth doing. They are not equally easy. Start where the time at stake is high and the setup is light, then build toward the bigger ones.



Placement is our read from the sources below and the setup each job takes at a 20 to 200 person firm.

THIS WEEK

1. Client emails and **2. meeting follow-ups**. Light setup, daily use, and the whole team feels it in the first week.

THIS MONTH

5. First drafts and **3. research**. They pay well once the AI can see your templates and best past work, and once there is a habit of checking sources.

THIS QUARTER

4. Document intake. The biggest block of time, and the most setup: connecting to where documents arrive and where the data has to go.

THE FIVE

Where the time is coming back.

None of these replace the professional. Each one takes a first pass off their plate, so their hours go to judgment, clients and review.

1 Client emails and updates, drafted for review

From a few notes, AI drafts the routine client email, status update, document request or follow-up in the firm's tone. The professional reads it, fixes it and sends it.

TIME AT STAKE	SETUP EFFORT	FIRST RESULTS
2 hrs a week per person on email[7]	Light	This week

HOW IT RUNS

Your notes → AI drafts in your tone → You edit and send

EXAMPLE MATH

8 people × 2 hrs × $120 × 46 weeks = $88,320 a year

WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

- The top accounting use of AI at 77%, up 14 points in a year (Karbon, a practice software vendor).[4]
- In a randomized trial across 66 organizations, active users spent about two fewer hours a week on email.[7]

Where firms get stuck

Everyone writes their own prompts in their own accounts, so quality depends on the person and nothing is shared. It pays when the whole team works from one setup built on your best emails.

2 Meeting notes into decisions, owners and next steps

The client or internal meeting is transcribed, with consent, and turned into what was decided, who owns each next step, by when, and what was promised. Then the follow-up email is drafted.

TIME AT STAKE	SETUP EFFORT	FIRST RESULTS
Every recap written after every meeting	Light	This week

HOW IT RUNS

Meeting → AI summary and action list → Lead checks it → Follow-up sent

EXAMPLE MATH

8 client meetings × 15 min saved = 2 hrs a week per partner

WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

- Meeting transcripts are the second most common accounting use at 59%, up 19 points in a year.[4]
- A word of realism: the same randomized trial found AI did not shorten meetings. The time comes back after them.[7]

Where firms get stuck

The recap lands in a chat window and dies there. The value shows up when the action items go into the system you already track work in, and one person owns checking them.

3 Research and long-document summaries

AI answers a technical question, or reads a long ruling, contract, filing or report and summarizes it, pointing to the passages it relied on. The professional opens those passages before anything is cited.

TIME AT STAKE	SETUP EFFORT	FIRST RESULTS
69% of tax pros using AI use it here[1]	Medium	2 to 4 weeks

HOW IT RUNS

Question or document → AI answer with sources → You open every source

EXAMPLE MATH

4 staff × 1.5 hrs × $110 × 46 weeks = $30,360 a year

WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

- Among tax and accounting professionals using generative AI, 69% use it for tax research and 57% for document summaries (Thomson Reuters Institute).[1]
- 60% of tax practitioners have adopted AI for research, up from 33% a year earlier (Blue J, an AI tax research vendor).[6]
- Specialist legal research tools tested by Stanford gave incorrect information more than 17% of the time.[10]

Where firms get stuck

Partners don't trust the output, so staff redo the work and nothing is saved. It pays when there is an approved tool, a source-checking habit, and a short list of question types it is allowed to handle.

4 Document intake and data extraction

AI reads incoming documents such as bank statements, invoices, tax forms and contracts, and pulls out the fields your team would otherwise type by hand, flagging anything missing or out of line.

TIME AT STAKE	SETUP EFFORT	FIRST RESULTS
3.5 hrs a week per accountant[8]	Heavier	4 to 8 weeks

HOW IT RUNS

Documents arrive → AI extracts and flags → Staff review flags → Data in your system

EXAMPLE MATH

8 staff × 3.5 hrs × $85 × 46 weeks = $109,480 a year

WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

- Data entry and processing is the top client-service use of AI at US accounting firms, at 54% (Intuit).[5]
- In a study of 277 accountants at 79 small and midsize firms, AI users moved about 8.5% of their time, roughly 3.5 hours a week, out of data entry (one study, run with a software partner).[8]

Where firms get stuck

This is setup work, not a prompt. It means connecting to where documents arrive and where the data needs to land, a rule for exceptions, and a tool approved for client data.[11]

5 First drafts of memos, reports and client summaries

From your notes, your template and two or three strong past examples, AI produces the structured first draft of a memo, report section, client summary or deck outline. The professional rewrites it and owns the conclusions.

TIME AT STAKE	SETUP EFFORT	FIRST RESULTS
25% faster on drafting work AI handles well[9]	Medium	**2 to 3 weeks**

HOW IT RUNS

Notes and template → AI first draft → You rewrite and own it

EXAMPLE MATH

5 managers × 1.5 hrs × $175 × 46 weeks = $60,375 a year

WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

- In an experiment with 758 BCG consultants, those using AI finished 12.2% more tasks, 25.1% faster, at 40% higher quality on tasks inside AI's abilities.[9]
- On a task outside those abilities, the AI users gave less accurate answers than consultants working without it.[9]

Where firms get stuck

AI can only draft like your firm if it can see your firm's best work, and most firms keep templates and past deliverables scattered across drives. The first job is pulling them into one place.

Example math is illustrative: the headcounts and hourly costs are placeholders, and the weekly hours come from the sources cited. Setup effort and timing are our estimates for a 20 to 200 person firm; your systems will change them.

+ **Also worth a look: a procedures assistant for your team.** Load your SOPs, checklists and templates into one place so staff ask it "how do we do this here" before they ask a partner. 43% of accounting professionals using AI already use it on SOPs, policies and process documents.[4]

TRY ONE THIS WEEK

The meeting follow-up, in ten minutes.

Uses one and two together. Paste this into the AI assistant your firm has approved, add your notes, and compare the draft to what you would have written.

1. Copy the prompt.
2. Replace the two bracketed parts: your notes from a recent meeting, and one follow-up email you have sent before.
3. Read the draft and the "Check before sending" list it adds at the end.
4. If you like the result, save the prompt as a project or custom instructions so your team gets the same thing every time.

Take out client names and sensitive details unless your firm has approved the tool for client data.

PROMPT

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You are helping me write the follow-up email after a client
meeting.

My notes or transcript from the meeting:
[paste your notes here]

Write the email in a plain, professional tone, under 200 words.
Include:
1. A one-line thank-you and what the meeting was about
2. What we decided
3. Next steps as a short list: what, who owns it, and by when
4. Anything I promised to send, and when they will get it

Do not invent dates, numbers or commitments that are not in my
notes.
If anything is unclear, list it at the end under "Check before
sending".

Here is a follow-up email I wrote before, so you can match my
style:
[paste one past email here]
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NEXT STEP

See which of these fits your firm first.



In an intro call we look at where the hours go in your firm and which of these would pay back soonest.

Book at cherryplaceai.com/intro-call or email tjryan@cherryplaceai.com. Cherry Place AI is not affiliated with any of the companies cited here.

GROUND RULES

Four things to settle before you roll out.

The firms getting value are not the ones using AI the most. They are the ones that decided how they would use it.

1

Client data goes into approved tools only

The IRS now tells tax practitioners to handle client data "using only secure, enterprise-approved AI."[11] Meanwhile 34% of professionals admit using AI tools their organization has not sanctioned.[2]

2

Everything AI writes is a draft

The same IRS guidance says to "treat the written text that AI generates as drafts" and check facts, citations and math.[11] A named person reviews before anything leaves the firm.

3

Write the policy down

Only 21% of accounting firms have an AI policy or strategy.[3] Where a firm has a named AI strategy, 66% of professionals say AI meets or beats expectations, against 22% where there is none.[2]

4

Measure the time you get back

Only 18% of organizations collect metrics on AI's return.[1] Pick one use, time it before and after for a month, and decide from that.

SOURCES

Where every number comes from.

All checked against the original or the named coverage in November 2026. Survey sponsors are listed so you can weigh them.

1 Thomson Reuters Institute, 2026 AI in Professional Services Report, January 2026. 1,514 professionals surveyed October to November 2025, 39% in the US. Adoption, ROI measurement, tax and accounting uses.

2 Thomson Reuters Institute, Future of Professionals 2026, June 2026. 1,816 professionals surveyed March to April 2026. Weekly use, unsanctioned tools, AI strategy.

3 Karbon, State of AI in Accounting 2026, January 2026. Nearly 600 accounting professionals. Karbon sells practice management software. AI policies.

4 Karbon 2026 findings as reported by CFOtech, January 23, 2026. Use case percentages (communication, meeting transcripts, SOPs).

5 Intuit 2026 Accountant Technology Survey, 725 US accounting professionals, as reported by CPA Practice Advisor, July 2, 2026. Intuit sells accounting software. Client communication, data entry.

6 Blue J and CPA.com 2026 tax research survey, 1,000 US accountants, as reported by Accounting Today, June 9, 2026. Blue J sells AI tax research. Research adoption.

7 Dillon, Jaffe and others, Shifting Work Patterns with Generative AI, randomized trial across 66 firms and 7,137 workers, November 2025 revision. Email and meeting time.

8 Stanford and MIT field study of 277 accountants at 79 firms, as reported by the Journal of Accountancy, August 20, 2025. Time moved out of data entry.

9 Harvard, BCG and others, the "jagged frontier" experiment with 758 BCG consultants, described by co-author Ethan Mollick in Centaurs and Cyborgs on the Jagged Frontier, September 2023, and by BCG. Speed and quality on drafting, and the accuracy drop outside AI's reach.

10 Stanford HAI, AI on Trial: Legal Models Hallucinate in 1 out of 6 (or More) Benchmarking Queries, May 2024. Research accuracy.

11 IRS Office of Professional Responsibility, Introductory Guidelines for Responsible AI Use in Federal Tax Practice, June 24, 2026. Client data and review.