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The Economics of Time to Value

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Introduction

AI is changing how enterprise software is implemented, adopted, and evaluated. As implementation work accelerates, customers are increasingly asking how quickly technology investments deliver measurable business value. This white paper focuses on the growing demand for "time to value" and the implications for partner economics. It builds on IDC's previous Sage-sponsored research into the emerging economics of AI in finance and "High Performance" for software partners. It provides a framework for how Sage partners can help their customers achieve accelerated time to value and drive business benefits through lifecycle engagement. It is written primarily for existing and prospective Sage partners, as a guide to evolving from implementation-led economics toward a lifecycle, outcome-based model. It also shows customers and investors how the Sage ecosystem can drive faster value realization.

Executive summary

This study introduces a Time-to-Value framework and examines what it means for the economics of Sage partners. The central question is how partners can create and capture value when speed to outcome becomes the measure of success.

Key research findings are as follows:

- **Go-live marks the start of the customer journey, not its end:** The Time-to-Value framework provides a structure for customer engagements that build value over time. An accelerated path to first value provides a proof point and establishes trust, which opens the path to value at scale. Following this approach, partners shift from delivering implementations to accelerating customer outcomes. This requires a different operating model, different capabilities, and a different commercial motion, not simply an extension of today's implementation model.
- **Time has become part of the ROI case:** Customers expect proof of impact sooner. The ROI window is shrinking, and AI is raising the bar further.
- **Faster delivery can expand the partner opportunity:** As AI compresses implementation effort, the opportunity moves to the lifecycle, spanning value measurement, optimization, governance, and managed services.
- **Partner value is shifting from hours delivered to outcomes accelerated:** Success increasingly depends on speed to outcome, breadth of outcomes, and duration of the relationship. That requires designing around outcomes, building trust into delivery, developing value engineering skills, and measuring the customer journey beyond go-live.

The partners best positioned to win will be defined not by the implementation hours they deliver, but by how quickly they turn customer investment into customer value.

Situation overview

Trust as the key to AI success – Insights from an IDC-Sage Study

AI transformation inside the finance function is gaining momentum, and the business case for it is real. However, a 2025 IDC study commissioned by Sage, based on a survey of 2,275 senior finance decision makers uncovered a tension at the heart of AI economics: a meaningful share of the time AI saves is consumed by the work of making its outputs trustworthy. Finance organizations are building new operational layers around validation, exception handling, source tracing, explainability, and governance. IDC refers to this cost as the "verification tax."

12.9 hours	**26%**	**71%**
a week is spent by finance professionals reconstructing, validating, and defending AI outputs	of expected AI time savings are lost, on average, to explaining and verifying outputs	of finance leaders would reject an AI system that cannot explain its outputs, even if it is highly accurate

n = 2,275; Source: IDC and Sage, The Emerging Economics of AI in Finance, 2026

The last finding is the most telling. Even if AI is highly accurate, finance leaders need to be able to understand, explain, and defend its results. Where they cannot, adoption stalls. The research therefore suggested that the defining challenge of enterprise AI adoption is shifting *from generating outputs to operationalizing trust*.

Research shows that trust is also what separates organizations that scale AI from those that do not. In IDC's *2026 Enterprise Application and Agent Strategies Study*, among organizations using AI agents, 84% of those with fully defined and enforced AI governance have agents in production across multiple business areas, compared with only 44% of those whose governance is still in development (Figure 1). The same pattern holds for decision speed, executive confidence, and AI maturity. In short: trust and scale move together.

Figure 1
Organizations with enforced AI governance are further along on every measure
(Percentage of respondents)

	Governance fully defined and enforced	Governance still in development
Agent users with AI agents in production across multiple business areas	84%	44%
Say AI has significantly improved the speed of decision-making	57%	8%
Say senior executives fully trust AI to execute autonomously in defined scenarios	40%	6%
Describe their organization as fully AI-enabled	45%	10%

n = 876 (226 with fully enforced governance; 309 with governance in development); agent-user base n = 204 and 178, respectively; Source: IDC's Enterprise Application and Agent Strategies Study, 2026

This is where time enters the economic equation. If trust determines whether AI-enabled value can scale, then time becomes an economic variable.

- How quickly can technology become operational?
- How quickly can a customer demonstrate a first measurable outcome?
- How quickly can that outcome become trusted and repeatable?
- And how quickly can it spread across additional workflows, users, entities, and processes?

Each question may carry a cost or a return depending on how quickly it can be addressed. The emerging equation around AI adoption then becomes:

Technology capability + Trust + Adoption + Time = Realized scaled value

Technology capability creates potential value. Trust makes that value usable. Adoption makes it repeatable. Scale, the outcome of capability, trust, and adoption sustained over time, makes it economically meaningful. And time determines how quickly the customer realizes the return.

Trust determines whether value can scale. Time determines whether the economics work.

For Sage partners, this reframes the opportunity. The verification tax is not only a cost for customers to bear; it is a signal of where partners can help. Reducing the effort needed to verify, explain, and govern AI shortens the path to trust, and a shorter path to trust accelerates the path to scaled value. The remainder of this report builds on that premise, beginning with why customers increasingly prioritize time to value before introducing a framework partners can use to act on it.

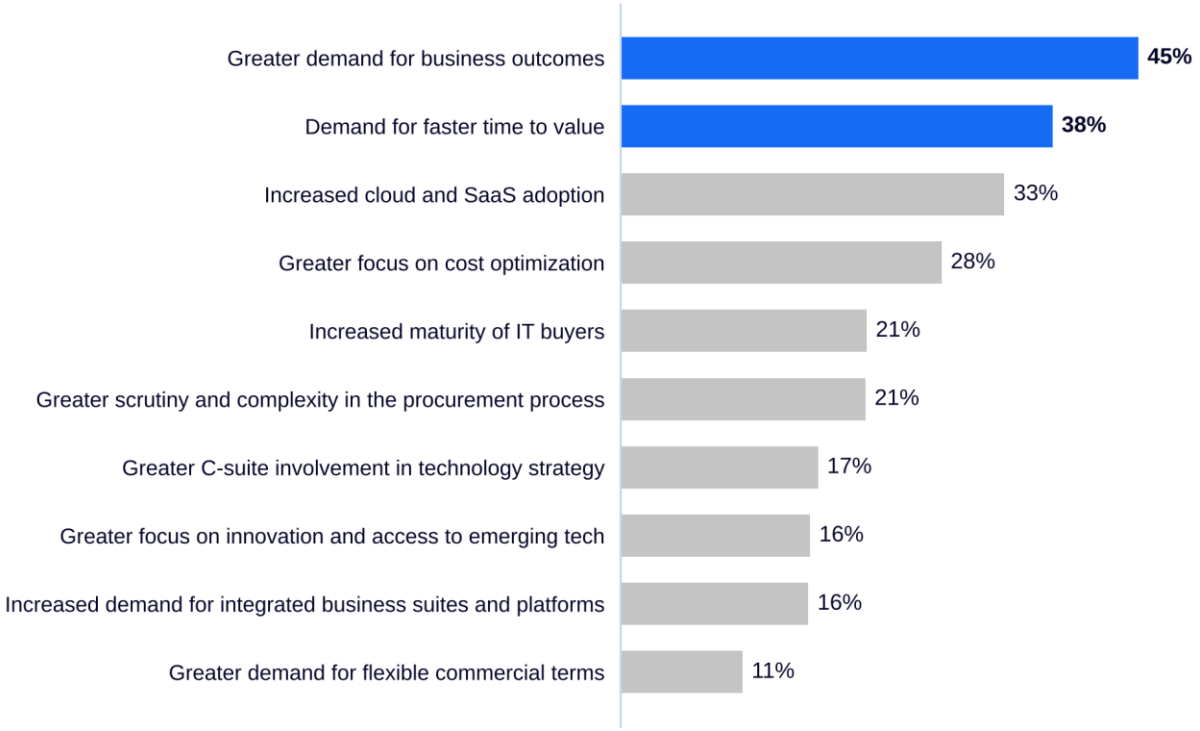
The growing importance of time to value

Customers want impact. As technology investments face increased scrutiny, enterprise buyers expect accelerated measurable impact. Traditional implementation milestones such as configuration, integration, user training, and go-live remain important, but they do not by themselves show that the business has changed. Finance leaders want evidence in operational terms: a faster financial close, less manual processing, fewer exceptions, faster invoice processing, and better financial visibility.

Research demonstrates that the clock is speeding up. According to IDC's *Digital Executive Sentiment Survey*, the typical ROI window among midsize businesses for digital investments shortened from 12–24 months to 6–12 months over a two-year period (IDC's *Digital Executive Sentiment Survey*, December 2024; n = 962 midsize businesses).

Partner sentiment corroborates this trend. In a 2025 IDC global study of software partners, commissioned by Sage, respondents highlighted growing demand for business outcomes (45%) and faster time to value (38%) as the top changes in customer behavior and expectations during the previous two years (Figure 2). In short, customers are asking for accelerated business impact.

Figure 2
Customers are asking for business outcomes and faster time to value
What are the most important changes you have seen in the last two years related to customer behavior and expectations? (Percentage of respondents; up to three choices)



n = 2,009; Source: IDC-Sage Software Partner Survey, "High Performance Unlocked," August 2025

AI raises the bar further. As AI takes on more configuration, data mapping, integration, testing, and documentation work, customers expect deployment cycles to shrink. The question they put to partners shifts from "*How long does implementation take?*" to "*How quickly can you show me that this investment is making a measurable difference?*"

The market is already responding. IDC views sub-90-day time to value, with ROI demonstrable before the first renewal, as a defining claim of AI-native finance automation vendors, and research suggests that finance software buyers increasingly gravitate toward vendors that prove measurable ROI within 12 months (IDC Market Presentation: Financial Applications 2026: What Winning Vendors Are Doing Differently). Customer size matters: for midsize and larger customers, 90 days is best read as an upper bound, while smaller businesses with simpler requirements typically expect to see value in weeks rather than months (IDC MarketScape: Worldwide SaaS and Cloud-Enabled Small Business ERP Applications 2024 Vendor Assessment).

Time becomes part of the ROI case. Traditional ROI calculations compare investment with eventual financial benefit. Increasingly, the speed at which that benefit arrives matters as well. Two projects with the same ultimate return can have very different economic value if one delivers measurable outcomes substantially earlier. Time to value therefore becomes more than an implementation metric; it becomes part of the investment case. IDC advises midsize businesses to adopt a "payback by design" approach, monitoring time and cost parameters from

the outset of every digital initiative and prioritizing providers that can prove the ROI behind their solutions (IDC FutureScape: Worldwide Small and Medium-Sized Business 2026 Predictions).

Speed also de-risks AI transformation. Faster, visible value is a way to manage risk. IDC projects that nearly half of AI-driven digital use cases will miss their ROI targets in 2026, citing unclear business gains, weak human-machine collaboration, and poor data foundations (IDC FutureScape: Worldwide AI-Fueled Business Strategies 2026 Predictions). Similarly, 35% of IT leaders name difficulty quantifying and demonstrating AI ROI as one of their top two obstacles to realizing AI's potential (IDC Survey: Worldwide Technology Buyer and Spending Outlook, March 2026). An early, measurable result gives customers evidence to defend the investment and the confidence to extend it. This links back to trust: the sooner a customer can see, verify, and rely on a result, the sooner AI moves from experiment to operating model.

For partners, the implication is direct. Customers are no longer buying implementation effort; they are buying the speed at which technology starts to matter. The next section introduces a framework that makes that speed measurable.

From implementation to impact: The IDC Time-to-Value Framework

Accelerated time to value means approaching customer engagements differently. The Time-to-Value (TTV) framework lays out three connected stages, with trust as the gateway between first value and value at scale (Figure 3).

Figure 3
The IDC Time-to-Value framework: three stages and the trust gateway
From deployment to value at scale

	STAGE 1 Time-to-Live (TTL)	STAGE 2 Time-to-First-Value (TTFV)	GATEWAY TO SCALE → Time-to-Trust	STAGE 3 Time-to-Scaled-Value (TTSV)
Definition	The time required for the technology to become technically operational	The time from deployment to the first measurable proof that a business outcome has improved	The point at which the organization is willing to rely on results broadly	The point at which value becomes repeatable, broadly adopted, and economically significant
Objective	Accelerate implementation while maintaining quality and control	Demonstrate business impact at the earliest possible point	Make value usable by shortening the verification effort	Secure company-wide outcomes, drive adoption, and enable verifiable ROI
Common milestones	Configuration, data migration, integration, user provisioning, testing, go-live	First month-end close, first invoice processed, first automated workflow completed	Explainability, data lineage, auditability, exception handling, human oversight	More workflows, users, entities, modules, and autonomy
Partner focus	Remove friction between purchase and operational use	Value engineering: baselines, KPIs, quick-win use cases, outcome reporting	Build validation, governance, and controls into delivery	Optimization, workflow redesign, change management, expansion, and advisory

Source: IDC, 2026

Stage 1: Time-to-Live (TTL)

Time-to-Live (TTL) is where the journey starts. It measures the time required for the technology to become technically operational, from configuration, data migration, and integration through user provisioning, testing, and go-live. The TTL objective is to accelerate implementation while maintaining appropriate quality and control.

Customer expectations are short, and delivery often runs longer. Asked how long they expect it to take a managed service provider to provision an application for end users, nearly four in five enterprise leaders (78%) said four weeks or less (IDC Managed Cloud View 2025, n = 1,503). By contrast, the average systems integration project runs about nine months (IDC Worldwide Systems Integration Services Usage and Investment Priorities survey, July 2025, n = 831). The two measures differ in scope, because provisioning an application is far narrower than a full systems integration project, so they are not a like-for-like benchmark for finance applications. They do, however, illustrate the persistent gap between the speed customers expect and the time complex delivery has traditionally required.

AI compresses this stage. AI and automation increasingly shorten configuration, data mapping, integration development, testing, documentation, and troubleshooting. The economic objective therefore shifts from maximizing implementation effort to removing friction between purchase and operational use. Being live remains the entry ticket, but it is no longer a differentiator. It shows that the system works, not yet that the business benefits.

Stage 2: Time-to-First-Value (TTFV)

Time-to-First-Value (TTFV) is where the investment starts to prove itself. It measures the time between deployment and the first measurable proof that the technology has improved a meaningful business outcome, such as the first accelerated month-end close, the first automated reconciliation, or the first invoice workflow completed without manual effort.

First value creates evidence. The customer moves from “We bought the technology because we believe it can create value” to “We have evidence that it is creating value.” Tracking metrics and KPIs to demonstrate success is the services activity buyers most need from a provider (32%), followed by clear objectives (21%) defined at the start of an engagement (IDC Services Path 2025, n = 3,240).

This elevates value engineering. Partners should help customers establish a baseline, identify high-value initial workflows, define success metrics, instrument KPIs, and communicate results internally. The primary goal is helping the customer prove the investment worked. Faster TTFV is the stepping-stone to building trust.

The missing link: Time-to-Trust

Time-to-Trust is the gate between first value and scaled value. A workflow can deliver a promising result without the organization being willing to rely on it broadly. Value can be demonstrated before it can be trusted, but it cannot be scaled until it is trusted.

Governance is the foundation of trust. IDC’s previous research found that organizations scale AI first in structured, reviewable, explainable workflows with clear governance boundaries. Buyers are specific about what earns that confidence: the governance capabilities rated most critical for trusting AI-driven execution are data privacy and compliance (43%), risk monitoring

and controls (39%), and human override mechanisms (38%) (IDC Enterprise Application and Agent Strategies Study, 2026, n = 876).

Trust can be engineered. IDC's previous research for Sage identified the verification tax: the effort users spend reconstructing explanations, validating outputs, investigating exceptions, and building extra controls around AI-generated work. Each of these activities stands between first value and reliance. Explainability, data lineage, auditability, exception handling, and human oversight reduce that effort, and doing so does more than lower operating cost: it shortens Time-to-Trust, which in turn accelerates Time-to-Scaled-Value.

Verification tax → Time-to-Trust → Time-to-Scaled-Value

Stage 3: Time-to-Scaled-Value (TTSV)

Time-to-Scaled-Value (TTSV) is where value becomes economically significant. It marks the point at which demonstrated value becomes repeatable, broadly adopted, and material to the business. Scale can unfold across more workflows, users, entities, capabilities, and levels of autonomy.

There is room to expand. Across more than 50 business subprocesses, respondents estimate that manual or semi-manual work still accounts for 32–39% of the work on average (IDC Enterprise Application and Agent Strategies Study, 2026, n = 876). That represents considerable headroom beyond the first successful workflow.

Autonomy grows as confidence grows. Organizations delegate in steps: only 10% expect predominantly autonomous operations with periodic audits over the next two to three years, while 41% expect humans to remain in the loop for critical decisions (same study). Finance follows the same path, extending autonomy first to routine, lower-risk decisions, a pattern IDC describes as controlled delegation (IDC Survey: Early Adopters of Agentic AI Use Cases Within the Finance Function, 2026). Trust therefore sets the pace of scale.

The partner role shifts again. As scale becomes the goal, partner value comes from process optimization, workflow redesign, integration expansion, AI governance, change management, and continuous improvement. The relationship moves from an implementation project toward an ongoing value relationship, and finance buyers say as much: they look to vendors for roadmap development, responsible AI policies, talent and change management, and use case prioritization (IDC Survey: Early Adopters of Agentic AI Use Cases Within the Finance Function, 2026).

Time to value and the Sage partner

Time to value in the Sage context

Product context. For Sage Intacct and Sage X3, the objective is to reduce the time and effort between purchase, operational use, and measurable customer value. The deployment approach and first-value milestones should reflect the agreed scope, customer readiness, and data and integration requirements. More complex engagements can sequence delivery around an initial business outcome before extending across further processes, entities, and capabilities.

Rapid deployment and migration. Rapid-deployment approaches and migration assistance can reduce repetitive work and create a more predictable route to operational use and first value. Their applicability depends on the product, agreed scope, source system, data quality, and integration requirements. Partners remain important in validating data, handling exceptions, and addressing customer-specific complexity.

Partner enablement. The enablement priority should be to help partners turn faster deployment into a repeatable, commercially sustainable customer-value proposition. This means combining technical readiness with scoping and qualification, deployment and migration methods, adoption, outcome measurement, and the development of ongoing services. Partners should be able to build on shared foundations while differentiating through industry expertise, advisory, process improvement, and managed services.

Evolving responsibilities. As the model moves toward lifecycle value, the division of work among Sage, partners, and customers is expected to evolve. The proposed direction is for Sage to provide increasingly repeatable product capabilities, deployment foundations, migration assistance, and enablement; for partners to build on those foundations through industry expertise, customer-specific integration, process redesign, adoption, and ongoing services; and for customers to own business priorities, data readiness, decisions, internal adoption, and acceptance of outcomes. Responsibilities would be agreed for each engagement, with outcome definition, measurement, and delivery governance agreed jointly and clear accountability at each stage.

Time to value as a business opportunity

The partner paradox: faster delivery can expand the opportunity. AI is reducing the labor needed to implement and configure software, which can look threatening to partners whose revenue is anchored in that effort. Yet the faster a partner delivers the initial solution, the sooner it can begin helping the customer capture additional value from it. If partners use the resulting capacity to support adoption, optimization, recurring services, and customer expansion, reducing implementation effort does not necessarily shrink the partner opportunity; it changes where the opportunity sits.

The opportunity moves to the lifecycle. IDC research finds that agentic AI improves customers' time to value while compressing early-lifecycle services revenue, shifting the economic center of gravity for partners from front-loaded implementation toward ongoing lifecycle, operational, and outcome-based value (IDC Market Note: The Shifting Economics of Partner Alignment in the Agentic AI Era, June 2026).

Partners recognize the opportunity. In the 2025 IDC-Sage survey of software partners, growing recurring revenue (52%) and developing or expanding managed services (44%) rank as partners' top two strategic priorities for the next two years (Figure 4), highlighting the growing opportunity around lifecycle engagement.

Figure 4
Partners are prioritizing recurring revenue and managed services
What are your company's most strategic business priorities over the next two years? (Percentage of respondents; up to three choices)



n = 2,009; Source: IDC-Sage Software Partner Survey, "High Performance Unlocked," August 2025

Figure 5 illustrates the direction of travel. In the traditional model, partner economics concentrate around implementation effort. In the emerging model, they extend across the customer value lifecycle, following the path of the TTV framework.

Figure 5
From effort to outcomes: the traditional and emerging partner model
Typical engagement flow and where partner economics sit

Traditional model Economics concentrated around implementation effort	**Scope →**	**Configure →**	**Implement →**	**Go live →**	**Support**
Emerging model Economics extend across the customer value lifecycle	**Deploy →** TTL	**Prove →** TTFV	**Trust →** Time-to-Trust	**Optimize →** TTSV	**Expand** TTSV

Source: IDC, 2026

TTV implies a repositioning: from monetizing the effort required to deploy technology to monetizing the acceleration and expansion of customer value. The next section turns to what this means for the economics of a Sage partner.

The emerging economics of the Sage partner

From labor economics to value economics. Traditional services economics reward effort: the more complex the implementation, the more hours billed.

More complexity → More hours → More services revenue

AI weakens this link, and the paradox points to a different logic, in which expertise rather than effort drives revenue:

Greater expertise → Faster outcomes → More customer capacity → More opportunities to expand

Four economic effects follow. Each is rooted in the TTV framework: faster Time-to-Live frees capacity and accelerates revenue, while proven, trusted, and scaled value open up the opportunity after go-live.

#1 Greater delivery capacity. If AI enables a partner to complete implementation work faster, the same organization can serve more customers without a proportional increase in headcount. How partners frame this gain matters. IDC research finds that buyers pay premiums when AI demonstrably improves analysis and advice, while discount pressure rises when AI is seen mainly as a delivery efficiency tool (IDC Perspective: AI's Impact on Pricing Models for Business Consulting Services Buyers, May 2026). Capacity gains should therefore be positioned as faster, better outcomes for the customer rather than lower effort.

#2 Faster revenue velocity. Shorter delivery cycles let partners move through projects faster and take on more customers in the same period.

#3 Expanded post-go-live services. Value measurement, optimization, integration, governance, workflow redesign, and AI enablement create revenue opportunities beyond implementation, the steps from Prove to Expand in Figure 5.

#4 Greater customer lifetime opportunity. Earlier, demonstrable success creates an opening for additional modules, workflows, entities, advisory work, and managed services. The opportunity shifts from maximizing the value of a single implementation to maximizing value across the customer lifecycle.

An illustration. Table 1 shows a simplified, hypothetical example of how these effects could play out for a representative partner whose team size stays constant. The figures are illustrative assumptions, not IDC forecasts or Sage data.

Table 1
Illustrative partner economics: traditional model versus emerging model
Hypothetical partner with a constant team (US$ millions unless stated)

Metric	Traditional model	Emerging model, Year 1	Emerging model, Year 2	Emerging model, Year 3
New implementations per year	20	25	28	30
Average implementation fee	$100,000	$60,000	$60,000	$60,000
Implementation revenue	$2.00M	$1.50M	$1.68M	$1.80M
Customers on recurring services (cumulative)	7	15	24	34

Metric	Traditional model	Emerging model, Year 1	Emerging model, Year 2	Emerging model, Year 3
Recurring and advisory revenue	$0.21M	$0.45M	$0.72M	$1.02M
Total revenue	**$2.21M**	**$1.95M**	**$2.40M**	**$2.82M**
Change versus traditional model	**n/a**	**−12%**	**+9%**	**+28%**

Source: IDC, 2026. Hypothetical figures for illustration only; not a forecast. Assumptions: constant team size; AI reduces implementation effort by about 40%, with fees falling in step; recurring and advisory services priced at $30,000 per customer per year; about one in three new customers adds a recurring service, and these customers accumulate over time.

What the illustration shows. Revenue dips by about 12% in Year 1 because lower fees arrive before recurring revenue builds, passes the traditional baseline in Year 2, and is roughly 28% above it by Year 3. The outcome depends on conditions that are not guaranteed: freed capacity must be converted into new projects, and enough customers must take up recurring services. If the partner completed only 20 projects in Year 3 at the lower fee, implementation revenue would be $1.2M, and recurring and advisory revenue would need to exceed about $1.0M just to match the traditional baseline.

The transition takes planning, and recovery is not automatic. Moving from hours-based billing to productized, outcome-oriented delivery can create an initial revenue dip, because implementation fees fall before new revenue streams mature. Faster customer acquisition and recurring revenue from managed services can offset the dip, but only if partners invest in the capabilities that generate them: productized offers and playbooks, value engineering skills, trust and governance built into delivery, and commercial models that pair recurring revenue with outcome-linked components. Partners will also need transition support, including enablement and reusable assets from Sage and the financial capacity to carry the dip. In the illustration above, the dip lasts roughly one year; in practice, its depth and duration will vary with a partner's starting revenue mix, pricing, and how quickly it converts freed capacity into new work. Partners that treat this as an investment in position, not a loss, are best placed to capture the opportunity. Table 2, later in this paper, suggests the order in which to build these capabilities. The next section distills these effects into a new partner value equation.

A new partner value equation

From billable effort to accelerated outcomes. The effects above change what partner value is made of. Where it was once a function of effort:

Partner value ≈ Implementation expertise × Billable effort

it becomes a function of how quickly, how broadly, and for how long a partner delivers outcomes (a conceptual equation, not a calculation):

Partner value ≈ Speed to outcome × Breadth of outcomes × Duration of relationship

Each term maps to the TTV framework. Speed to outcome reflects Time-to-Live and Time-to-First-Value; breadth reflects Time-to-Scaled-Value as value spreads across workflows, users, and entities; and duration reflects the trust that sustains the relationship. Each term can also be linked to commercial results through the scorecard in Figure 6: speed to outcome to time from signature to the first-value event and to revenue velocity; breadth to workflows, modules, and entities added and to revenue and margin per customer; and duration to retention, contract

tenure, and customer lifetime value. A partner that wants to use the equation as a commercial model would need to define and baseline each term for its own business. This also changes the incentive. A partner that needs fewer hours to create an outcome becomes more productive, provided it converts that advantage into greater capacity, broader services, and deeper customer relationships.

The unit of partner value is shifting from hours delivered to outcomes accelerated.

Commercial models are starting to follow. Outcome-based pricing is not the norm, but it is gaining momentum. In IDC's survey of services buyers, 30% of live services-as-a-product engagements already use outcome-linked pricing and 48% use a hybrid of two or more models. The main barriers are risk allocation and attribution rather than measurement (IDC Survey: Enterprise Perceptions of Services as a Product, 2026, Part 1: Adoption, Outcomes, and Commercial Models, September 2026, n = 820). For partners, the practical starting point is a hybrid model that pairs recurring revenue with outcome-linked components, which rewards the speed and breadth of value delivered, not the hours spent.

What partners will need to do differently

Capturing this opportunity means working differently across the customer journey. While there is no single transformation path for every partner, five changes consistently emerge as important enablers of faster time to value. The priority and sequence will vary depending on each partner's starting point, business model, customer base, and strategic ambitions, but each is closely tied to the TTV framework.

#1 Design around outcomes from the start. Define measurable customer outcomes and a baseline before implementation begins, rather than after go-live. This is the "payback by design" principle applied in practice, and it makes every later claim of value provable.

#2 Identify the first-value event. Every engagement needs an early proof point. The key question is what the earliest meaningful event would be that convinces the customer the investment is working, whether a first accelerated close or a first automated workflow. This shortens Time-to-First-Value.

#3 Build trust into delivery. For AI-enabled workflows, validation, explainability, exception management, governance, and human review belong in the design, not in a later cleanup. The goal is faster trusted deployment, which reduces the verification tax and shortens Time-to-Trust.

#4 Develop value engineering skills. KPI definition, baseline measurement, business-case development, benchmarking, outcome measurement, and adoption analysis become core partner capabilities, because they are how partners prove value and unlock scale.

#5 Productize expertise into industry playbooks. Reusable templates, workflows, KPI libraries, controls, governance patterns, and first-value use cases shorten time to value for every new customer while creating differentiation that AI alone does not commoditize. The strongest partner IP builds on and complements the common foundations Sage provides, such

as standard deployment assets, migration tooling, value and KPI libraries, governance patterns, and enablement, adding industry expertise, process redesign, advisory, and managed services.

A phased path. Few partners can put all five changes in place at once. Table 2 suggests an order of priority based on how quickly each change pays back and how far it depends on the others. Starting with outcomes and the first-value event builds the evidence on which later investments rely.

Table 2
A phased transition plan for Sage partners
Indicative sequence and timing; adjust to the partner's size, customer mix, and starting capabilities

Phase	Priority changes	Practical steps	Why in this order
1. Start now 0–6 months	#1 Design around outcomes #2 Identify the first-value event	Agree outcomes and a baseline with the customer before work begins; define the first-value event in every proposal; pilot with two or three willing customers.	Lowest investment and fastest payback. Shortens Time-to-First-Value and creates the evidence later changes rely on.
2. Build 6–18 months	#3 Build trust into delivery #4 Develop value engineering skills	Add validation, explainability, and review checkpoints to the delivery method; train or hire value engineers; report the four-part scorecard (Figure 6) to customers.	Moderate investment. Builds on Phase 1 baselines and shortens Time-to-Trust, the gateway to scaled value.
3. Scale 18–36 months	#5 Productize expertise into industry playbooks Hybrid commercial models	Package proven workflows, KPI libraries, controls, and first-value use cases as playbooks; introduce hybrid pricing that pairs recurring revenue with outcome-linked components.	Highest investment and greatest long-term differentiation. Depends on the evidence and repeatable practice built in earlier phases.

Source: IDC, 2026

Together, these changes move a partner from delivering projects to accelerating outcomes, and they create the evidence base that outcome-linked commercial models require. The next section looks at how to measure that progress.

Measuring the new customer journey

Measure what the customer values. Traditional engagement metrics, such as project completion, users trained, and system live, show that work was done, not that value was created. Partners need a scorecard that follows the customer journey across four categories that mirror the TTV framework (Figure 6).

Figure 6
A four-part scorecard for the customer journey
Measuring beyond go-live

Metric category	What it shows	Example metrics
Deployment Time-to-Live	How fast did we get live?	Time from signature to go-live; migration and integration completion
Outcome Time-to-First-Value	How fast did the customer see first proof?	Time to the first-value event; KPI improvement against baseline
Trust Time-to-Trust	How confident is the customer in relying on it?	Exception rates; verification effort; review burden; user confidence
Scale Time-to-Scaled-Value	How broadly is value spreading?	Workflows, users, and entities added; modules adopted; level of autonomy

Source: IDC, 2026

Trust becomes a measurable metric. Trust metrics are the least conventional addition and the most important. Exception rates, verification effort, and review burden show whether the verification tax is falling and trust is building, turning an abstract cost into something partners can manage and report.

Customers see the gap. Buyers with live services-as-a-product engagements report that providers trail their stated priorities most on defining and tracking outcome KPIs and building in continuous improvement, the very capabilities this scorecard supplies (IDC Survey: Enterprise Perceptions of Services as a Product, 2026). A partner that reports all four categories can show customers where value stands and what comes next, and that evidence is what outcome-linked commercial models require.

Why the time to act is now

Partners face a choice. AI will continue to compress traditional implementation work, and customer expectations are already moving with it. Partners can defend an economic model built around implementation effort, or they can use AI to increase their own capacity while moving higher into the customer value lifecycle.

The stats are encouraging, and ROI is the next step. Research shows that partners are moving in the right direction. Within the IDC-Sage survey of software partners, 71% see themselves as strategic business advisors and 68% say they directly impact customers' businesses. The top priority now is accelerating the focus on measurable business impact and demonstrating ROI for customers, which 58% feel confident they can (Figure 7).

Figure 7
Partners can leverage their positioning as strategic advisors
Share of partners that (strongly) agree with the following statements (Percentage of respondents)



n = 2,009; Source: IDC-Sage Software Partner Survey, "High Performance Unlocked," August 2025

The window to choose is open now. IDC sees AI's greatest impact where undifferentiated delivery work is easiest to automate. Partners that pivot early toward differentiated expertise, reusable IP, and outcome-based economics shape the market rather than react to it. The advantages build on each other: more delivery capacity and faster deals, stronger differentiation and customer retention, more room to expand, and recurring services and advisory relationships that position the partner as a trusted advisor.

Faster delivery is the starting point. The objective is not simply to do the same implementation work faster. It is to use faster implementation as the foundation for a broader, longer customer relationship, one measured by time to value at every stage. The guidance that follows turns this into practice.

IDC essential guidance: Realizing faster time to value

IDC recommends that partners treat time to value as an operating model, not an implementation KPI. Seven actions put this into practice.

#1 Start with the outcome, not the project plan. Define what first value looks like, and how it will be measured, before implementation begins.

#2 Instrument value. Establish baselines and KPIs up front so that improvement is demonstrated rather than assumed.

#3 Optimize Time-to-Trust. Treat explainability, validation, governance, and auditability as accelerators of adoption, not compliance overhead.

#4 Use AI to increase capacity. Capture implementation efficiencies rather than protecting effort, and present the gain to customers as faster, better outcomes.

#5 Build for expansion. Design the first implementation as a pathway to additional workflows, users, entities, and capabilities.

#6 Productize expertise. Turn successful implementations, controls, integrations, and workflows into repeatable industry playbooks.

#7 Align commercial models with customer progress. Explore hybrid models that pair recurring revenue with outcome-linked components, so partner economics grow as customer value does.

Conclusion: From delivering software to accelerating value

The previous era of enterprise software rewarded partners for making complex technology work. That skill still matters, but AI is changing the question customers ask: not how long implementation takes, but how quickly they see the difference it makes. Sage's earlier research showed that capability alone does not guarantee value; trust, explainability, and governance decide whether value can scale.

The Time-to-Value framework connects these threads, from Time-to-Live through Time-to-First-Value and Time-to-Trust to Time-to-Scaled-Value. For partners, faster delivery does not mean a smaller opportunity. It is the starting point for a broader, longer customer relationship, where the unit of value is outcomes accelerated, not hours delivered.

The partners positioned to win may not be those that generate the most implementation hours. They may be those that remove the most time between customer investment and customer value.

About the IDC analysts

Kevin Permenter
Research Director, Financial Applications, IDC

As a research director, Kevin M. Permenter provides insights and analysis across multiple Fintech market segments including accounting, revenue management, corporate tax, accounts payable, accounts receivable, treasury and enterprise payment management. Kevin leads qualitative research efforts which drive a series of technology buyer-focused documents including Marketscapes, buyer perspectives, Peerscapes and end-user surveys. He also leads several quantitative research efforts within financial applications that feed key technology supplier-focused documents like Market Shares, Market Forecast, Market Glance, Market Analysis Perspectives. Kevin's research includes a particular emphasis on the interplay, challenges, and trends driving financial application deployment and its role in the evolution of the complex financial technology ecosystem.

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Andreas Storz is a research director for software channels at IDC. His research examines how technology vendors and their partners work together, including partner business models, vendor-partner relationships, and the evolving economics of partnering and alliances. He is a contributing analyst on IDC's 2025 Global Partner Survey and a co-author of IDC research on EMEA partnering ecosystems and on the effect of agentic AI on partner economics.

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Message from the sponsor

AI is changing how software is implemented, adopted, and judged. Customers no longer ask how long implementation takes; they ask how quickly they will see a measurable difference.

At Sage, we commissioned this IDC research to help our partners meet that expectation. Building on earlier IDC studies of AI economics in finance and partner high performance, *The Economics of Time to Value* introduces a framework that runs from Time-to-Live through Time-to-First-Value and Time-to-Trust to Time-to-Scaled-Value.

The message for partners is encouraging: faster delivery does not shrink the opportunity, it moves it to the customer lifecycle, where outcomes, advisory, and ongoing services create lasting value. Sage is committed to supporting you with the enablement and foundations that make faster, more trusted outcomes repeatable.

The seven actions in IDC's essential guidance offer a practical place to start, and we look forward to working with you as you turn speed into customer value.

Gretchen O’Hara, EVP WW Strategic Partnerships & Business Development, Sage

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