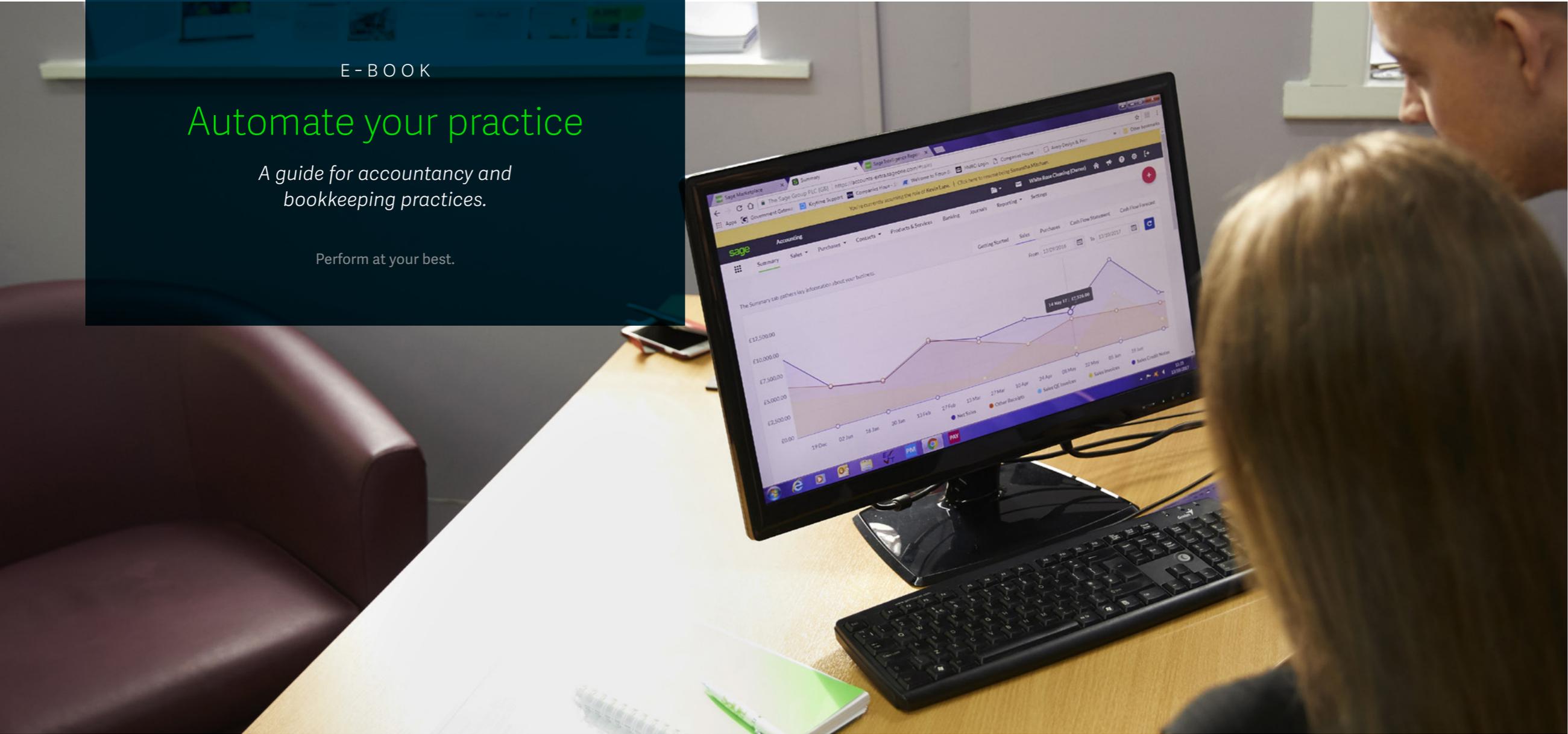


E-BOOK

Automate your practice

A guide for accountancy and bookkeeping practices.

Perform at your best.



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Automation in practice

Automation offers accountancy and bookkeeping practices the opportunity to focus on delivering more value to clients.

Collating, organising, and processing large amounts of data in an efficient way will help you be more successful, achieve your ambitions and perform at your best.

Finding the right approach will help balance the possibilities of adopting automation and transition smoothly. This guide will help your practice transition to automation and realise the benefits of eliminating manual processes without compromising on service.

“Jobs that would have taken 2 days now take 2 hours with AutoEntry”

— Nick Wetherall, Moore & Smalley



Pull information in faster



Major time saver



Accurate



Secure



Improved client experience



Growth platform



Preparing for the next round of Making Tax Digital

With the generally successful roll-out of MTD for VAT, the profession is braced for further digital tax developments over the next few years. These will likely impact corporation tax, and income tax for the self-employed, so preparing your systems of data collection and handling which will be core requirements is smart thinking.

Firms have the opportunity to adapt their processes and ways of working ahead of the next wave of anticipated changes. Automating manual data entry and admin processes to standardise data collection and ensure consistent accuracy can form an effective approach to meeting future compliance requirements.

During the last tax season nine million hours were spent on manual data entry

As the pace of new regulation quickens and broadens, increasing emphasis surrounds how to manage the initial transition and create a system that will 'run itself'.

Recent examples of GDPR and MTD for VAT show how internal changes must be accommodated within the practice, as well as your clients' businesses. While compliance change is inevitable for many practices, legislative change has encouraged the transition to digital record keeping and reporting.

Now is the perfect time to unlock exciting opportunities for automation. Investing in these changes will help create untapped capacity that enables you to better prepare for future change, whilst realising immediate benefits in terms of time savings and greater efficiencies.

Speed and timeliness of information

Business is shifting to a near-live environment, so financial processes need to match the speed at which decisions are made. Access to real-time data enables a transition to more proactive and informed decision-making. For accountancy and bookkeeping practices, this opens up opportunities to change how you work with your clients.

Producing accurate and meaningful management accounts quickly, managing VAT and payroll efficiently, and completing year-end returns and tax information helps improve the visibility of business performance and cash outflows, and provides data that can lead to better decision making.

Automation is about creating the right controls and processes to manage the flow of information around revenue and costs. In turn, it helps to reduce the amount of time required to manually process and manipulate data. An agile service is a better service and forms the foundations of your future success.

63% of Accountants', Bookkeepers' and Finance Teams' time is spent on manual data entry





Bridging the skills gap with clients

Many small businesses still rely on paper-based records or aren't aware of the benefits and efficiencies that a digital approach delivers. This can create problems when it comes to timely reporting under an increased burden of regulation, and hamper their ability to remain competitive.

For some, automation could simply mean taking pictures of receipts on their phone and forwarding invoices by email can save considerable time and speed up bookkeeping. Such simple changes can have a direct impact on cash flow, including automated invoice credit control to reduce aged debts and boost their bank balance.

Simplifying the payroll process and allowing staff to access their own payslip and personal data online could greatly reduce the amount of additional administration around printing, distribution or providing repeat information.

Attracting, retaining and inspiring talent

The future success of any practice is built upon a strong talent pool. Whether you're a start-up sole practitioner considering future growth, or an established small or medium-sized firm, attracting, retaining and engaging staff is key.

Replacing departing employees, or recruiting for a growing team is a costly and time-consuming process for firms, so ensuring that your employees are engaged and enjoying their role is an important way of maximising retention.

Ensuring that your employees are engaged and enjoying their role is an important way of maximising retention.

Replacing manual data entry with automated processes at the heart of your firm also opens up the opportunity to use the time saved to train and cross-skill the team so resource and capacity can be shared more fluidly.

Better client service, delivered by more engaged and higher performing staff will help with client retention, but also underlines the potential of working within a progressive firm to future employees.

Headspace to work on your own businesses

Time is a precious resource within any accounting or bookkeeping practice. However, finding the time to work on the business is important for a firm owner to ensure that their personal, as well as business goals, are considered, planned and actioned.

Automation is a way of creating the internal platform and control for providing services to clients and allowing ample time for strategic practice planning and managing. So having a reliable, accurate and robust system in place can enable you to:

- Create the capacity to take on even more work
- Improve the quality of existing jobs at a reduced cost
- Expand the provision of business insight and advisory work
- Outsource low value and low risk work
- Increase your talent pool by providing remote working opportunities
- Improve profitability
- Spend less of your own time within the business



The foundations of automation

Automating data entry is not just about the technology, but the outcomes this change delivers for you, your firm, and your clients.

Creating systems you can trust

Capturing financial data from sales and purchase invoices, bank statements and employee expense data is the first step in eliminating manual data entry in your firm.

Combining this with document fetching means you can now automatically sync and download supplier documents, such as those from utility companies, with the data reliably recognised, coded and published directly to the ledger.

Reliability and repeatability is key to trusting the outputs from the automation solution and giving you confidence in the system. Seeing and tracking financial data from paper or email sources through to ledger and reconciliation is a major step in unlocking the benefits of automation and extending its usage across the client base.

Creating better workflows... even if the client doesn't want to change

Automation often allows you to adapt your workflows to benefit even those clients that do not want to change or learn new processes. This could mean having better ways of handling clients who still rely on you to work through their (disorganised) paper records, or removing administrative tasks from payroll clients like the distribution of payslips and handling of basic queries.

With automation technology taking care of the data collection and processing, resources can be focused on analysing the data and using these insights to inform and advise clients. Regardless of the level of client interaction the focus for your team shifts from data input and repair to managing exceptions providing value to outputs.

For outsourced payroll services, reducing the amount of hands data has to travel through, and making it easier for employees to access their own data can almost eliminate basic administration. This gives skilled staff the time to handle more clients, deal with the more complex requirements and adding value to the client relationship. Greater efficiency means resources can be shared across the practice to help flatten workloads during busy times.

**Over two million hours are lost on
handling outsourced payroll**

Work with any client on any software

Creating a scalable automation strategy for your practice that can be applied across all of your client base, regardless of bookkeeping solution, is key to unlocking the full benefits of the technology.

Data entry inaccuracy and lost receipts/ paperwork account for 33% of wasted time

Sage's vision is to automate manual data entry and processing so practices can better use this time on what matters most to the firm. Our investment in acquiring AutoEntry and building new tools such as the Sage VAT Centre mean you can continue to base your choices around the best technology fit for you and your clients, without the need to compromise.

Scaling and adapting to suit every firm

All accounting practices are different: the structure of the firm, the age profile of the partners, the types of clients they attract, sector specialisms and even geography can play a part. Automation works best when it's scaled based on the needs of your firm and client base, rather than be treated as an arbitrary solution that's imposed with no clear idea of how it is built into established workflows.

Automation technology should mould itself around how you and your clients work, without adding complexity or cost. If you're new to automation, then trialling some basic manual workflows and building from there is a wise approach which allows you to scale at your own pace. For those practices already transitioning to automation, then using the right technology that can adapt as you evolve is key - particularly in relation to optimising any automated workflows you've already introduced.



Thinking through the whole end-to-end process

Automation is proven to drive down the time taken on manual tasks, and in turn the whole cycle of work. Reducing processes that might have taken two weeks to two days, and from two days to two hours is a significant resource saving, but also speeds up the ability to then process that data (management accounts, VAT reporting, year-end processes and payroll).

The focus therefore does not have to be restricted to a single part of the process, but can be opened up to thinking about streamlining end-to-end workflows across different departments or services within the practice.

Using the right technology that can adapt as you evolve is key — particularly in relation to optimising any automated workflows.

Where to automate

Automation is proven to drive down the time taken on manual tasks, and in turn the whole cycle of work. Reducing processes that might have taken two weeks to two days. Here are some great places you can save time and effort by automating your business processes.

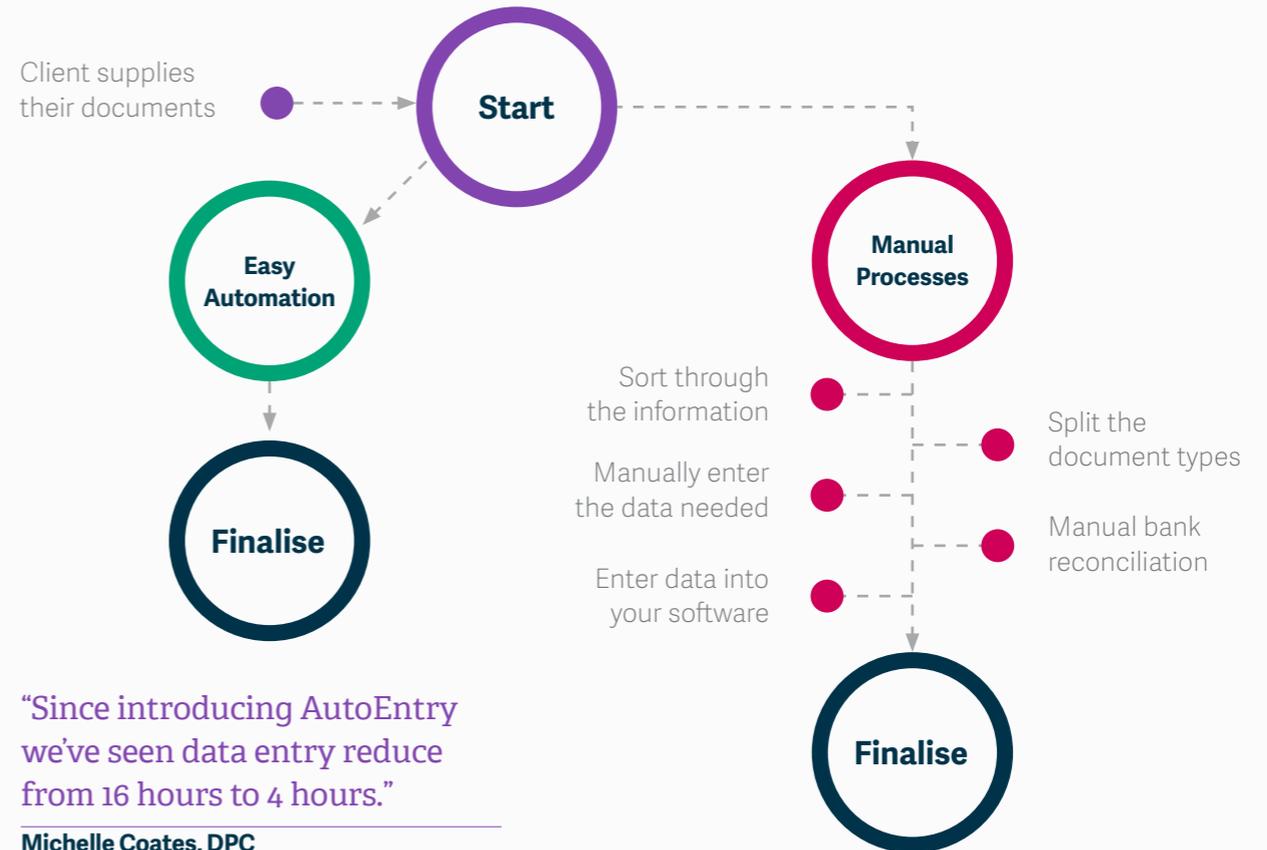
Automating manual data entry means:



Bookkeeping — Data Input

Purchases and invoices

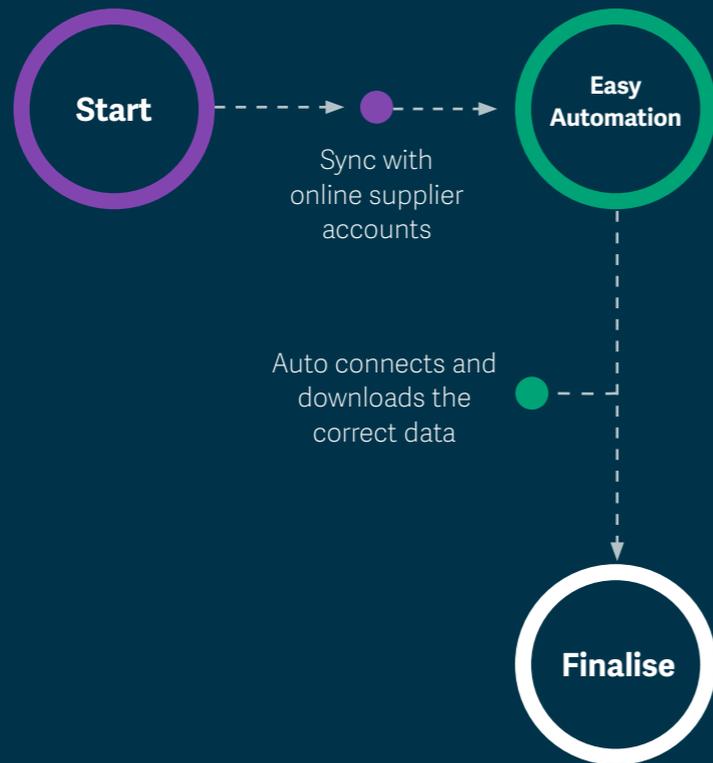
Transitioning your workflows to automate processes means you can significantly reduce the manual processing time across your bookkeeping client base.



Bookkeeping — Data Input

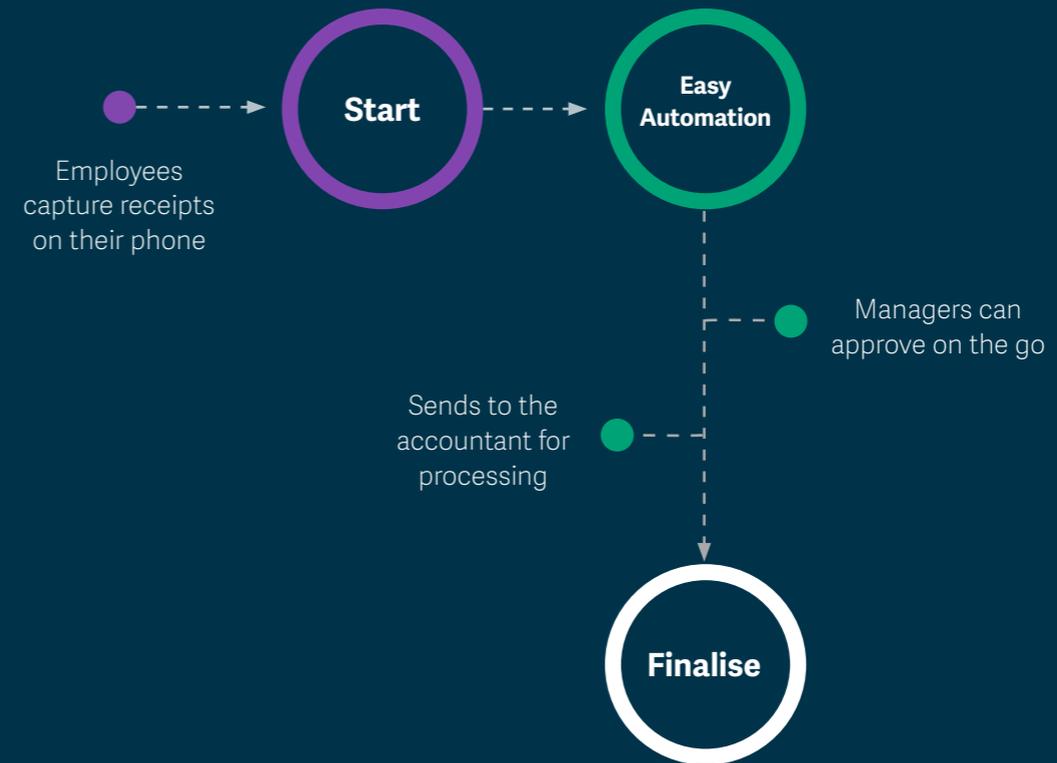
Automatically retrieve regular bills and statements

Connect to thousands of suppliers worldwide to download and sync documents automatically and post directly to the ledger.

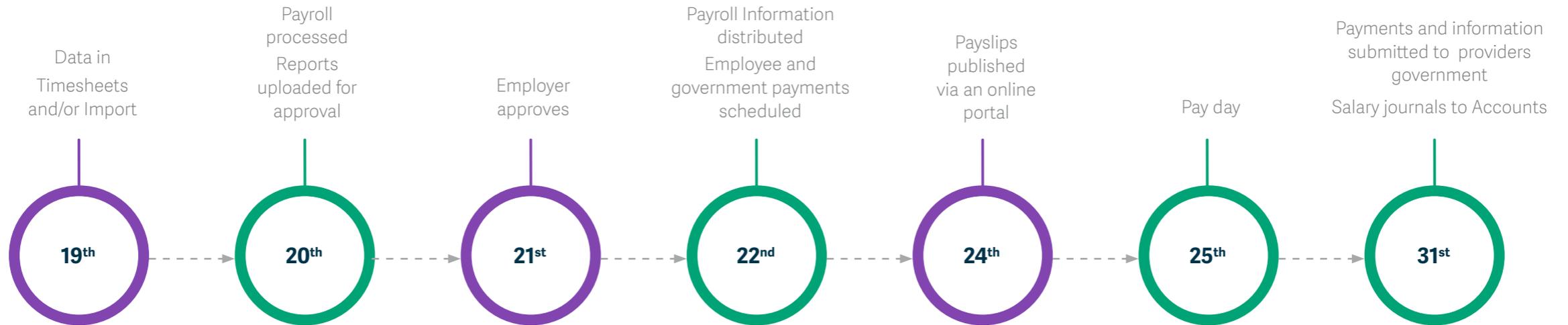


Employee expense management

Employees can upload all of their expenses ready for approval. Once approved, these expenses can automatically be posted to the ledger.



Payroll — an automation example



Benefits



Audit Trail



Major time saver



Accurate



High Data Security



Improved client experience



Improved employee engagement

Tax — Sage VAT Centre

The Sage VAT Centre service gives you visibility of MTD VAT information for clients that are linked to your Agent Services Account (ASA) which you can no longer see on the MTD ASA gateway.

- Manage your MTD VAT clients regardless of software, for free, all in one place
- View historic MTD VAT 100 information and open obligation periods for your MTD VAT clients
- View MTD VAT payments, liabilities and submission due dates for all your clients
- Filter your client list by MTD signup status giving you an instant view of all your MTD VAT clients
- Manage 64-8 VAT client authorisations

Benefits



Single authentication for your practice, removing the need to log in to ASA for every client



Control who has access to client data through user permissions



In-product help and support to help you make the most of this functionality

The benefits of automation

Structured, clean data allows you to understand and do more

The combination of well-structured data, which is of high quality, generates the ability for your firm to do more. Well-structured data can cleanly flow between systems, meaning that automation can be explored and adapted to the very end of a process, not just in part.

A typical Accountant or Bookkeeper has a real-time connection with only **22%** of their clients

Data at the heart of client advisory conversations

With client accounting in the background, having data in real time allows for preemptive problem solving.

Tax Planning

Open up conversations around tax planning with reliable, structured and timely data.

Business Advisory

Reporting tools can provide live impressions on the most pressing and relevant insights and feed in directly to management decision making.

Proactive indispensable services

Spark conversations with your clients and unlock additional advisory opportunities.

Having timely and accurate data, in the place it is required, without the need for complex manual processing or iterations of spreadsheets can turn data analysis into an on-demand service for clients.

Data security

The benefits of automation on security are wide-ranging and resonate strongly to accountants' and bookkeepers' duty of care to client confidentiality and also obligations under GDPR.

Automation provide reassurance around the quality of your procedures, ensuring an additional level of client-side protection against fraud or data breaches.

Client experience

Clients might not need to see automation in action, but they will be interested in the results.

Automation, from a client's perspective, is about their accountant providing them with the best tools and means of getting the job done. The easier it is for you to supply them with the information they need, and take more of the hassle away from them and their teams, the better they will view your services.

Priority of automation

Every firm will be different when it comes to identifying areas to automate, however, there will often be people as well as business components to consider. The most effective are those that are tied to real outcomes.

Instant capacity

Technology is a great enabler, so focussing on areas where you can free up staff time or remove blockages in your workflow can provide you with instant extra capacity.

Greatest impact on staff

Generating excitement and enthusiasm from staff by focussing on areas that will remove frustrations they have and allow them to focus on more enjoyable tasks.

Take on more

Capitalise on areas where you know you can comfortably take on more work after automation, and make it a cornerstone of your growth plans.

Help clients become more digital

Improve the digital readiness of clients by providing tools and services that are within their competencies, or by digitising more of their processes on the firm side.

Streamline where you spend the most time

Identify where your team spends the most time and look to see if old processes can be improved in whole or in critical parts.

Thinking bigger

Small adjustments can build to substantial gains over time, however bigger things could have an even greater impact. Start with a bold plan.

Automate your practice

Perform at your best with Sage

At Sage, we understand that you didn't join the profession to handle shoeboxes of records, or spend your time rekeying client documents.

Automating manual processes and repetitive tasks can give you the time you need to deliver amazing experiences for your clients and team.

We're here to help you unlock the possibilities of automation so you can focus on helping your practice and clients to succeed. With Sage, you can eliminate manual data entry and processing to make collaboration effortless.

Grow your practice with the peace of mind that the capture, processing and retention of paperwork is automatically taken care of.

Benefits of Automation



Reduce cost and time spent on manual data entry



Eliminate human error



Gain better visibility of your data



Protect data more effectively



Create the capacity to take on more new clients



Reduce paper consumption

Start your automation journey with Sage

Discover the solutions that will help you break free from manual processes so you can perform at your best.

AutoEntry

AutoEntry allows you and your clients to easily capture documents such as invoices, receipts, supplier statements, bank statements and employee expenses. Seamless integration with Sage and many other bookkeeping packages means that key information from documents is captured and posted automatically without any manual intervention from you, making your workflow as smooth and simple as possible. And we can save you even more time with the ability to fetch bills from thousands of suppliers worldwide automatically, so you don't have to wait for your clients to login to their various supplier websites to download them.

Sage Business Cloud Accounting

Everything you and your clients need to manage small business finances, from invoicing and expense management, to compliance and VAT. Use secure Bank Feeds, easily sort and code transactions and benefit from auto-matching with smart rules to save up to 80% of time spent on data input. Clever payments integration means your clients can get paid faster and easily master their cashflow. With quick and simple corrections and customisable access also mean you're always in control.

Sage Online Bureau

Save time, reduce errors and standardise your processes with an automated online payroll solution. Deliver a professional and valuable service by connecting your clients and their employees through smart online technology. Stay in control of the data you handle by storing and sharing it securely with only the right people. Boost your bureau performance with no compromise on security.

Sage VAT Centre

Manage all MTD VAT clients in one place, for free, and regardless of bookkeeping solution. View information about your clients' MTD VAT Returns and status, and manage 64-8 VAT client authorisations. All accessed through Sage Business Cloud Accounting Partner Edition.

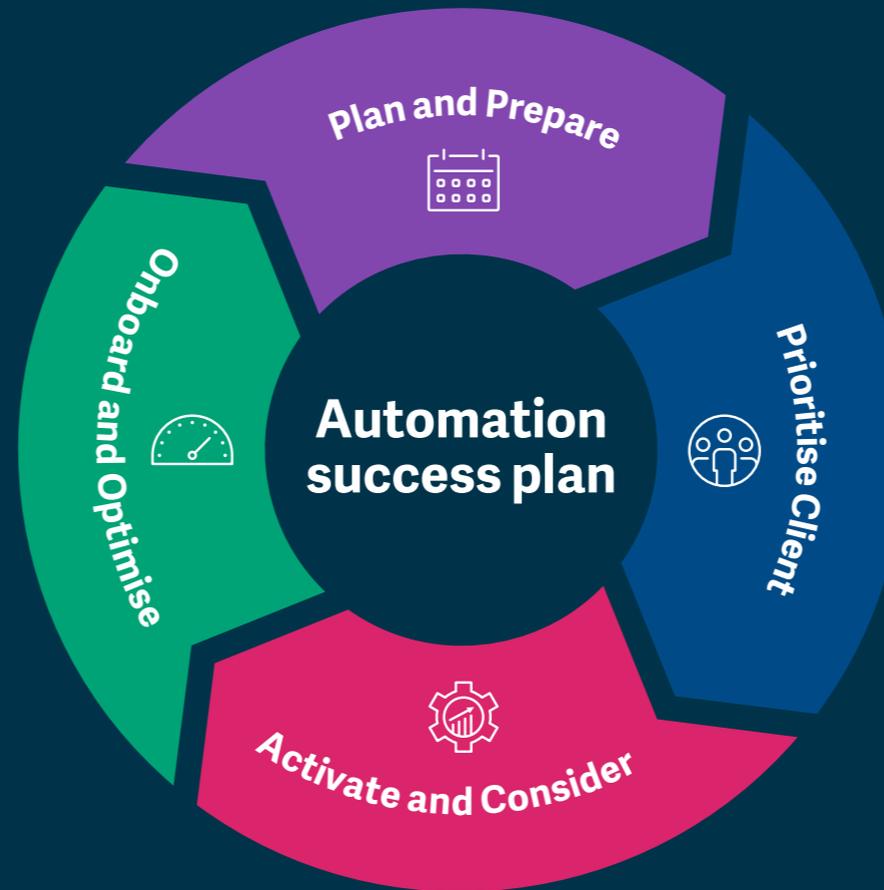
[Book your demo](#)

[For more information on the above products or to book your demo visit \[sage.com/uk/automation\]\(https://sage.com/uk/automation\)](#)

Your practice success journey

At Sage we are here to support you through your automation journey and help your practice to realise the value and benefits of eliminating manual data entry and processing so that you can start saving time now.

Following these steps will help you to transition your ways of working, both within your firm and with your clients. Helping you to streamline your workflows and embed automation technology so that you can perform at your best.



- Automation consultation with Sage
- What to automate first
- Success plan for your practice, your people, your clients
- Train the team



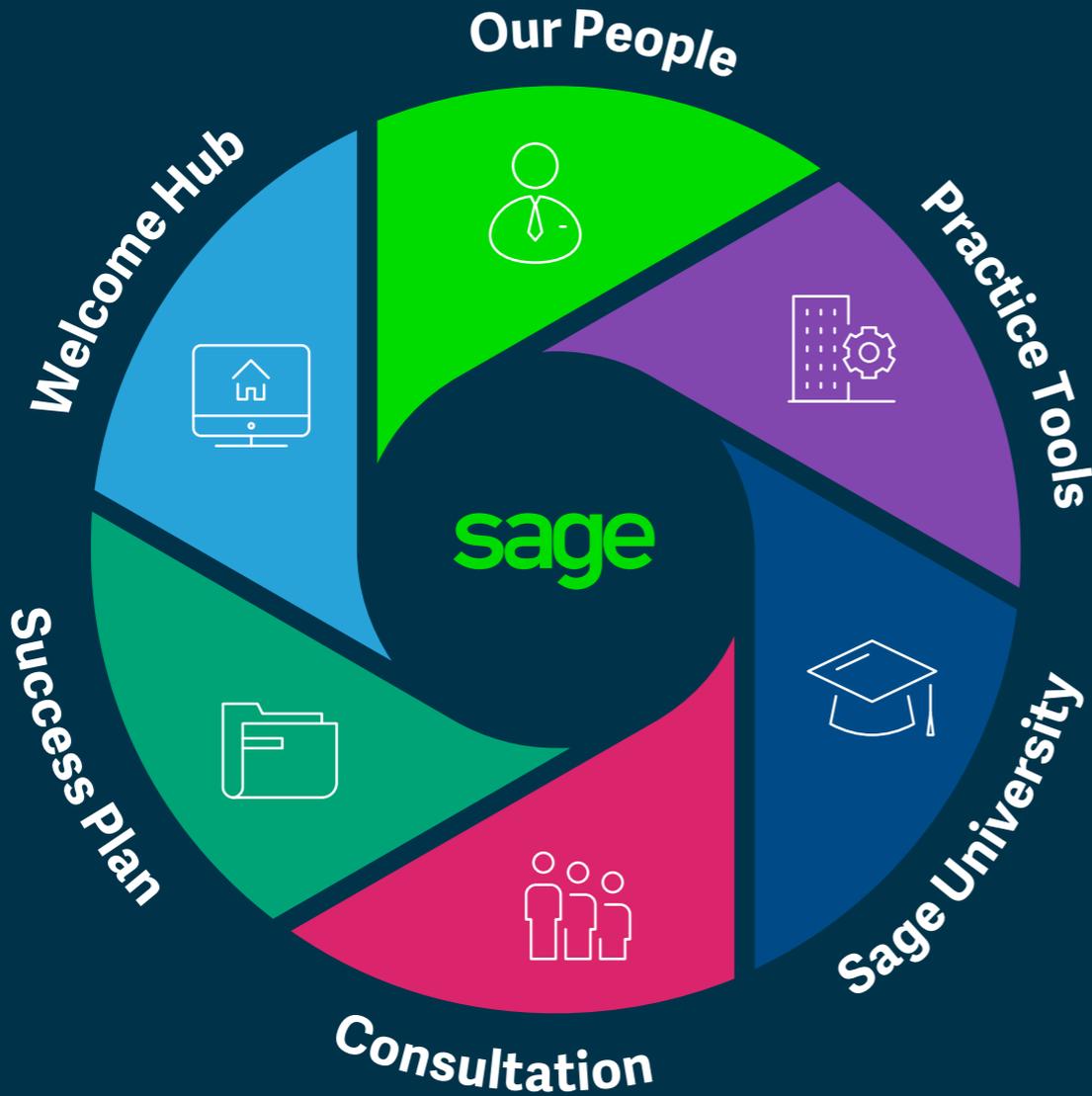
- Which clients to automate
- Which clients will participate
- What they provide and when



- Determine use cases per client
- Level of analysis
- Information to automate
- Rules for invoice and fetch
- Mobile



- Onboard clients
- See the ROI fast
- Increase utilisation
- Success plan review with Sage



Help from Sage to automate your practice

At Sage we're on a mission to automate all data entry and speed up admin for every accounting and bookkeeping practice in the UK.

Working with your dedicated Sage Practice Success Manager you can unlock the benefits of automation to your practice and the way you work, with a tailored success plan for your firm. And our Practice Enablement team are with you every step of the way to get you up and running quickly, and helping to make your automation journey a success.



Interested in learning about how we can help you automate data entry and streamline workflows across your practice?

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