



WHEN LESS IS MORE: What Auditors Actually Want From AI

Insights from our Benchmark Survey on where technology can actually improve audit workflows.

It's 2026 and, if you asked most of us twenty years ago, we probably imagined flying cars and a Rosie the Robot helping around the house. Instead, we've all found ourselves navigating the rapidly evolving world of artificial intelligence.

Today, we have tools that can correct grammar, draft long reports from a few prompts, summarize documents, and even find the best airfare deals. At the same time, accounting and audit firms are having increasingly serious conversations about how AI should fit into their technology strategy. Some firms are investing in sophisticated tools to automate workpapers, others are exploring platforms like DataSnipper or Trullion, while many teams are still relying heavily on Excel formulas that have served them well for years.

Against this backdrop, one of the most interesting findings from our recent Benchmark Survey of our team, our "Goldies", was surprisingly simple. Most respondents weren't asking

for complex AI systems. They were asking for tools that make simple tasks simpler.

That insight raises an interesting question for the profession: ***Does AI in audit actually need to be complex to be useful?***

What our Goldies are asking for

When we asked our Goldies where technology could improve productivity, a clear pattern emerged. The majority of the suggestions focused less on advanced analytics and more on reducing everyday friction in the audit workflow.

One common request was for a workflow tracker that could help teams manage engagement progress more efficiently. Ideally, such a tool would track progress using timestamps, alert team members when client responses are received, and clearly show what work is ready to be performed next. A central dashboard showing completed items,

outstanding tasks, and key engagement milestones would allow teams to quickly understand where an audit stands at any given moment.

Anyone who has worked on an audit engagement knows how much time can be spent simply coordinating these moving parts. Following up on requests, checking whether documents have been uploaded, and confirming whether another team member has completed their section.

In theory, this could also be addressed through better engagement coordination or administrative support. But the core insight remains the same: auditors are looking for tools that remove administrative bottlenecks so they can focus on the work that actually requires professional judgment.

Another recurring request involved automation within the audit file itself, just over 30%. Respondents highlighted the value of tools that could roll forward working papers to the next period and automatically update templates when trial balances change. Anyone who has spent hours manually updating schedules or re-linking numbers will immediately recognize the appeal.

There was also strong interest in tools capable of reading contracts and extracting key information, such as payment terms or rental amounts, into working papers. While this may sound like a relatively straightforward application of AI, it can significantly reduce the time spent reviewing large volumes of documents.

Other suggestions included tools that could help assess engagement risk, automate the transfer of data between systems (for example from platforms like Inflo into working papers), track WIP and budgets across engagements, and create dashboards that update automatically when financial data changes.

Individually, none of these ideas sound particularly revolutionary. Collectively, however, they point to something important about how audit teams actually work.

The AI expectations gap

Across the industry, many conversations about AI focus on transformation: predictive analytics, advanced risk modelling, and automated testing of entire populations. Yet the feedback from our Goldies suggests that the immediate opportunity may lie somewhere much more practical. Many auditors are not asking for AI to replace professional judgment.

They are asking for technology that helps coordinate the flow of work across an engagement.

This aligns with findings from broader industry research. For example, surveys conducted by organizations such as Thomson Reuters and ICAEW have consistently shown that professionals see the greatest value in AI when it automates repetitive or administrative tasks rather than complex decision-making processes. In fact, a majority of accounting professionals say the biggest productivity gains from AI will come from reducing routine work.

In other words, the real opportunity for AI in audit may not be about making the profession more sophisticated. It may be about making it less fragmented.

The operational question firms should ask

Interestingly, some of the solutions highlighted by our Goldies could be addressed not only by technology but also by improved engagement structure. Many firms are beginning to recognize the value of roles focused on engagement coordination or workflow management. Individuals who ensure that client communication, document requests, and file organization run smoothly throughout the audit.

Whether solved through automation or better role design, the underlying challenge is the same: **audit teams need clearer ownership of the administrative processes that sit alongside technical work.** When those processes run efficiently, engagement teams can focus on what they were trained to do.

What this tells us about AI in audit

The responses from our Goldies suggest that the future of AI in audit may be less about radical transformation and more about practical improvement. Tools that reduce friction in everyday workflows may ultimately deliver more immediate value than complex systems that are difficult to implement or integrate.

This doesn't mean advanced analytics or AI-driven risk assessments won't play a role in the future of audit. But it does highlight an important principle for firms thinking about technology investment: **Sometimes the most valuable innovation is the one that makes the workday a little simpler.**

A final thought

The audit profession has always balanced structure with judgment. As firms explore the possibilities of artificial intelligence, it may be worth remembering

that technology does not always need to be revolutionary to be impactful.

Sometimes the biggest gains come from solving the small problems that everyone experiences but no one has had the time to fix. And based on what our Goldies are telling us, there are still plenty of those opportunities waiting to be addressed.

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