A WEBEXPENSES GUIDE

Speaking CFO

How to build a business case for finance automation that gets signed off

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Good technology doesn't win budget on its own. Plenty of automation projects stall even when the operational case is obvious. Usually it's because the proposal talks about making the team's life easier, not about what the CFO is measured on.

Leadership rarely approves spend to make a process "easier". They approve it to deliver a return, reduce risk, shorten cycles and free up cash.

Whether you work in order to cash or purchase to pay, you have to translate team pain into board priorities. Here's a six-step way to do it.

Step 1: Put numbers on the problem

"The team is overwhelmed" and "reconciliation takes too long" sound like complaints. Leadership responds to cost and consequence.

Start by measuring what manual work costs you today:

- **Time.** How many hours a week go on keying, chasing approvers and matching by hand?
- **Cash.** How much is tied up in slow collections or missed early settlement discounts?
- **Errors.** What do disputes, duplicate payments and incorrect postings cost each month?

Then rewrite the problem in those terms. "Our payment reconciliation is slow and manual" becomes something like this:

> *"Our AR team reconciles 85% of remittances by hand. That takes two people, around £150,000 a year, and adds four working days before cash is allocated."*
>
> Illustrative figures. Use your own.

Try it: P2P Control Score

Not sure where to start measuring? The Purchase-to-Payment Control Score asks a few quick questions about how purchases, invoices and approvals work today and shows you where control is weakest.

Get your P2P Control Score →

https://latest.webexpenses.com/finops-platform/purchase-to-payment-control-score

Step 2: Link it to what the board cares about

Executive committees judge spend against a handful of commercial priorities. Your proposal should tie each benefit to one of them.

What the team gets	What the CFO gets
Faster remittance matching	Working capital: lower DSO and more cash available
Invoices matched and routed without manual handling	Margin protection: no late fees, more supplier discounts captured
Disputes logged and tracked in one place	Customer and supplier retention: less friction
One shared workflow	Governance: tighter fraud controls and audit-ready records

Then state the outcome at business level:

> *"Automating cash application should cut DSO by [X] days, freeing £[X] of working capital to fund growth without adding headcount."*

Step 3: Scope by where the pain sits

Don't present automation as one big technology project. Match specific capabilities to specific problems.

Order to cash

- **Order capture.** Orders arriving by email, API or upload are read and turned into sales orders, with pricing and SKUs checked on arrival.
- **Cash application.** AI reads remittance advice in any format and matches payments to open invoices, so people only handle the exceptions.
- **Collections.** Collections work is prioritised by risk instead of working down an aged debt list from the top.

Purchase to pay

- **Invoice matching.** AI reads invoices as they arrive, and two- or three-way matching against the purchase order and goods receipt leaves only the genuine exceptions.
- **Purchase control.** Spend is approved before money is committed, so nothing gets bought off-contract.
- **Supplier controls.** Bank details are validated before payment, which closes one of the most common routes for fraud.

Step 4: Show the full cost alongside the return

A credible business case is balanced. Promise a disruption-free rollout, or leave out the cost of change, and the finance director will stop trusting the rest of the numbers.

Costs	Returns
Subscription or licence fees	Hours redeployed to higher-value work, and hires you no longer need
Integration and implementation	Lower DSO (AR) and better-timed payments (AP)
Onboarding and workflow design	Fewer duplicates, penalties and billing errors
Internal time spent on the change	Early settlement discounts captured

Model three scenarios (conservative, base and optimistic) and set a payback target your finance team agrees is realistic. A cautious number you hit is worth more than an ambitious one you miss.

Try it: FinOps Platform Savings Calculator

Want a quick first estimate before you build the full case? The FinOps Platform Savings Calculator shows what automating your finance processes could save, using your own numbers.

Calculate your savings →

https://latest.webexpenses.com/finops-platform/savings-calculator

Download: business case template

Our free Excel template follows the six steps in this guide. Enter your own numbers and it calculates your baseline cost, three-scenario returns and payback, then builds a one-page summary and 60-second pitch for you.

Get the business case template →

https://www.webexpenses.com/resource/finance-automation-business-case-template/

Step 5: Answer the risk questions before they're asked

CFOs and CIOs will look for what could go wrong. Address it up front.

- **ERP disruption.** Choose a platform that connects to your ERP and keeps it as the system of record, rather than one that needs changes to your core system.
- **Adoption.** Show a rollout plan and training approach, not just a product that's "easy to use".
- **Security and compliance.** Ask for the certifications your auditors will expect. Webexpenses, for example, holds ISO 27001.

Step 6: Start small and prove it

Don't ask the board to approve a full transformation on day one. A big-bang rollout feels risky, and risk stalls decisions.

Propose a contained first phase with a clear measure of success:

- Automate invoice processing for your highest-volume suppliers.
- Roll out cash application in one business unit or brand.
- Test risk-based collections on one group of overdue accounts.

A focused first phase shows how quickly value arrives and gives you your own numbers to build the full case on.

The 60-second pitch: a template

Keep the summary short, numerical and about value:

> **TEMPLATE**
>
> "Our [order-to-cash / purchase-to-pay] process is largely manual. It costs around £[X] a year in staff time and [holds DSO at X days / misses £X in supplier discounts]. Automating [cash application / invoice matching] would take most of that work off the team and free up £[X] of working capital. To manage risk, we propose starting with [one unit / top suppliers] and measuring results before we expand."

Finance automation isn't a software purchase. It's a commercial decision. Present it in terms of cash, risk and return, and you're asking for what the board already wants.

NEXT STEP

Building the case for AP automation?

Book a 20-minute discovery call and we'll talk through where automation would make the biggest difference in your process.

Book a discovery call

KEEP GOING

Download the business case template →