



MARKET REPORT

# Funding the Future for Healthcare Suppliers

Redefining how business process  
optimization can help drive growth  
and supply chain resilience

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# Executive Summary

Healthcare suppliers are at a tipping point. There's more innovation and competition than ever before in the products and services offered, but business process optimization has not kept pace with this evolution.

These suppliers are, by and large, still using a significant number of manual processes in order management, invoicing, payment collections, and credentialing documentation and tracking. The consequences are far-reaching and more impactful than yesterday's value equation — like invoice errors leading to slower payment and higher days sales outstanding (DSO) — when processes aren't automated. But there is also a high cost when it comes to inefficiencies that affect the customer experience, and the day-to-day experience of suppliers' workforce talent. These challenges influence scalability, efficiency, and sustained revenue growth. As a result, new strategies to redefine and support growth and resilience are crucial.

In a new survey of 55 healthcare leaders, representing a broad range of supplier types and organization sizes, an overwhelming majority reported using manual processes across multiple parts of the business including sales, order management and fulfillment, and invoicing and payment processing.

Respondents were asked to weigh in on key obstacles and opportunities in four strategic areas, including:

- Commercial Execution
- Customer Experience
- Operational Efficiencies
- Cash Flow Optimization

To explore the high impact of business process inefficiencies in healthcare, Global Healthcare Exchange (GHX) commissioned healthcare consultancy Sage Growth Partners to conduct this survey in September 2024. The survey yielded responses from a variety of leadership roles, representing diverse organization sizes and supplier specialties.

This report summarizes those key survey findings.

## Key findings

### Top priorities

#### STRATEGY

**74%**

view technology adoption as very/extremely important

#### INVESTMENT

**62%**

say new product development is the most important use of investment funds

#### GROWTH

**82%**

ranked retaining and expanding sales with their current customer base as their top commercial priority

### Top challenges

- **89%** of the market uses some form of manual process for managing order automation
- **Only 2%** of respondents believe they are excelling in order automation, and only 2% believe they are excelling in their invoice and payment process
- **69%** of respondents experience occasional or frequent delays or disruptions due to vendor credentialing issues
- **Nearly half** of respondents believe that efficiency in order-to-cash processes is crucial to sales success, yet only 8% believe their processes today meet their company's needs to sell



# Unlocking the power of productivity

The global hospital supplies market size was valued at \$42.5 billion USD in 2023, and is predicted to reach \$125.9B USD by 2033.

An increasingly competitive landscape is one of the reasons **customer retention, expansion in current markets, and investment in and successful launch of new products or services** were overwhelmingly cited by suppliers as the top priorities to drive revenue growth.

There is a new FDA rule that suggests timing may be reduced for medical devices approved for use in the U.S. This is one of the factors considered in predictions for growth in both volume and variety of devices to be developed and distributed in the next 10 years.

Considering the priority of commercial execution to drive revenue growth, respondents cited the following as most important

82%	Retaining and expanding sales with current customer base
76%	Acquiring new customers in current markets served
73%	Successfully launching new products or services
42%	Maintaining competitive pricing
38%	Expanding into new geographical markets in North America
38%	Obtaining better contract compliance to extract value modeled
38%	Consistent customer access for your commercial teams
38%	Successfully selling into alternative points of care such as ambulatory surgery centers
27%	Expanding into new geographical markets outside North America
OTHER	Hospital at home care
OTHER	Expanding Margin within customer base

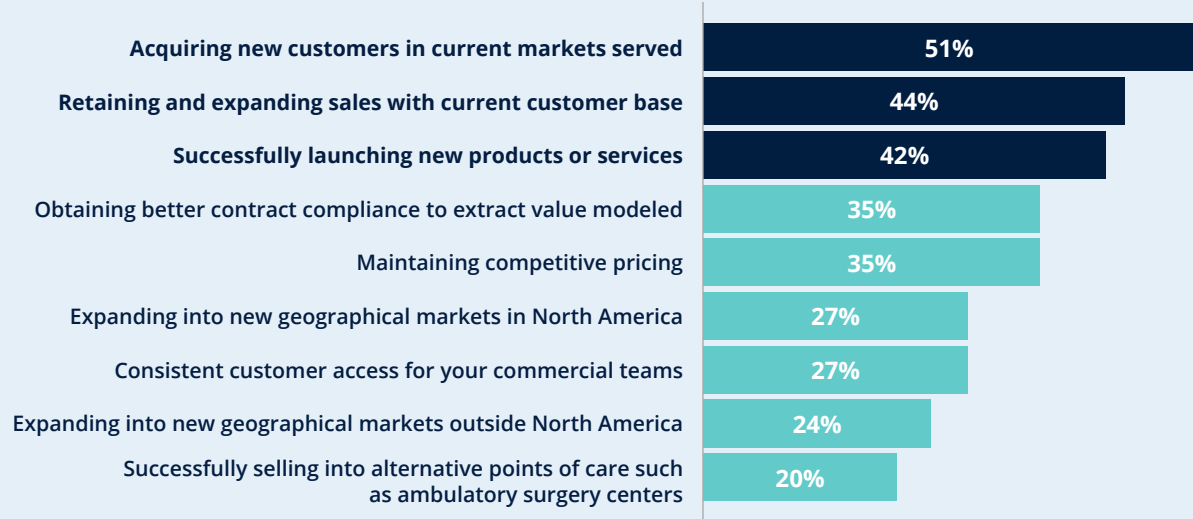
## 56%

of respondents identified commercial execution to drive topline growth as their organization's most important strategic priority.



As it turns out, the top challenges—customer retention, current market expansion and investment and successful launch of new products— are also reported as top priorities to drive revenue growth.

### What are the biggest challenges your organization faces to drive topline growth?



These challenges make holistic changes imperative. As labor costs continue to rise, supplier organizations need to do more with less. For many years, health system clinicians have been challenged with the ability to operate at the top of their license, spending far too much time on manual tasks and resolving errors as a result. The argument can be made that the same holds for any organization including healthcare suppliers.

Regardless of where in the healthcare ecosystem a job function may reside, manual and repetitive processes can impact job satisfaction and can lead to data inaccuracies due to human error. Each point where there is a gap in automation presents the potential for errors impacting key customer events such as product delivery, invoicing, and payment. These pain points can be reflected in customer experience and cash flow, both of which are closely tied to future growth.



# Reducing sales administrative burden

The majority of respondents cited reducing supply chain costs and manufacturing costs as their top operational priorities, followed closely by reducing non-selling administrative tasks for their sales teams. The key difference between the first two priorities and latter is that supply chain and manufacturing costs are heavily influenced by external market forces. In contrast, improving a supplier's sales team productivity is much more manageable and can be addressed with existing technology solutions.

**When considering the priority of customer experience to retain and grow customer base, respondents cited the following as most important**

**31%**  
Managing supply chain disruptions

**25%**  
Consistent customer access for your sales and product specialist teams

**Considering the priority of operational efficiencies to drive down costs, respondents cited the following as most important**

**35%**  
Reducing supply chain costs

**27%**  
Reducing manufacturing costs

**24%** Reducing sales team non-selling administrative tasks

**15%** Reducing customer service / support costs



**Considering the priority of cash flow optimization to reinvest, respondents cited the following as most important**

**40%**  
Inefficiencies of manual invoicing and accounts receivable processes

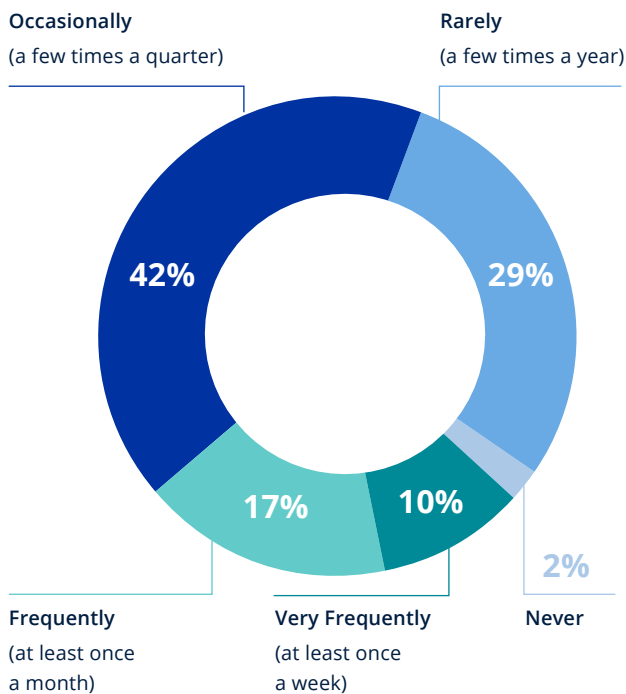
**20%**  
Limited internal resources





With the increasing complexity of vendor credentialing requirements, the time and effort needed to achieve and maintain compliance continues to grow. These requirements are diverse and frequently change, even across facilities within the same health system. This complexity demands more time and effort to maintain compliance, adding administrative burdens that can detract from sales productivity.

### How frequently does your company experience delays or disruptions due to vendor credentialing issues?



More than two-thirds — 69% — of respondents reported occasional or frequent delays due to vendor credentialing challenges citing varying requirements and manual processes as the top challenges. **Despite these difficulties, only 8 percent have chosen to outsource their credentialing processes**, while 60% believe that centralizing credentialing documentation and tracking through technology would provide the most improvement.

### In which areas of the vendor credentialing process do you believe technology solutions or outsourcing process could provide the most improvement?

- 60% Centralizing credentialing documentation and tracking

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- 60% Reducing the time associated with credentialing

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- 42% Automating the submission and renewal of credentials

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- 33% Integrating credentialing processes information with other supply chain systems

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- 31% Providing real-time updates on the status of credentialing applications

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- 27% Enhancing compliance monitoring and reporting

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- 4% Outsourcing credentialing management to specialized service providers

Streamlining vendor credentialing processes—through technology and outsourcing—can help reduce the volume of manual compliance tasks, which often lead to delays, added costs, and administrative inefficiencies. Removing much of the administrative burden enables sales teams to focus on sales activities for sustained business growth while allowing organizations to adapt more swiftly to evolving demands.

**What benefits do you think your company would gain from implementing technology solutions or outsourcing processes for vendor credentialing?**

**54%** Reduced administrative burden

**27%** Improved accuracy and compliance

**50%** Faster credentialing approvals

**23%** Improved employee satisfaction and retention

**35%** Better coordination with hospitals and health systems

**15%** Access to expertise and specialized knowledge through outsourcing

**29%** Cost savings over time

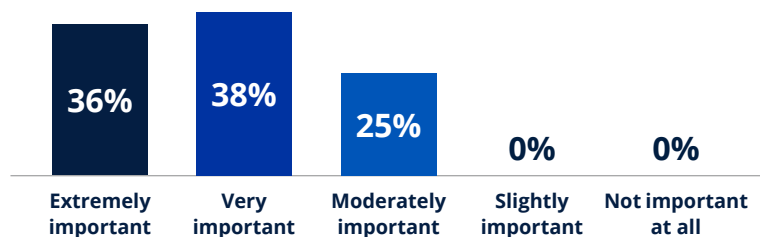




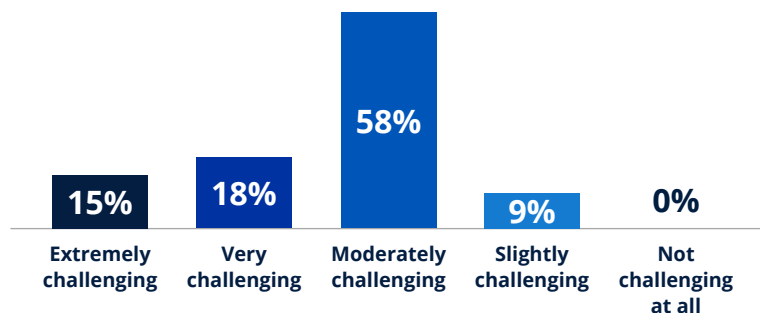
# The high cost of order-to-cash inefficiencies

Credentialing isn't the only area of the healthcare supply chain that's burdened by evolving requirements. Varying levels of digital transformation by health systems create challenges for healthcare suppliers when it comes to automating transactions — and transaction automation can have direct impacts on fiscal performance and customer experience. Barriers to maximizing transaction automation are likely one reason that **74% of suppliers view new technology adoption as very or extremely important to achieving their strategic goals.**

**How important is adopting new technology solutions to achieving your company's strategic goals?**



**How challenging is it for your company to keep up with the evolving technology requirements of hospitals and health systems for automated transactions?**



## Evolving from transactional to transformational

**A seamless order-to-cash journey aligns sales, finance and operations.**

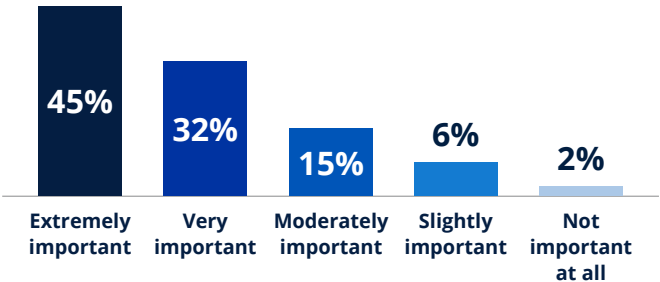
**Vital cornerstones are:**

- 1** A streamlined credentialing process for smoother facility access and accelerated service readiness
- 2** Fully automated order management and invoicing process
- 3** Optimized payment collections to accelerate cash flow and reduce costs
- 4** Robust reporting and analytics for continuous improvement

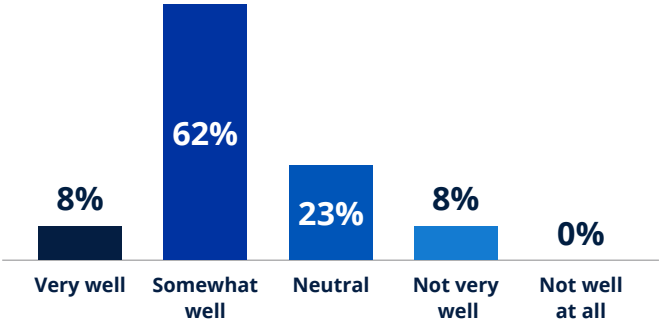


Nearly half of respondents believe efficiency in their order-to-cash processes is crucial to sales success, yet only 8% believe their current processes meet their needs. An overwhelming majority of respondents experience frequent delays and errors in the order-to-cash process.

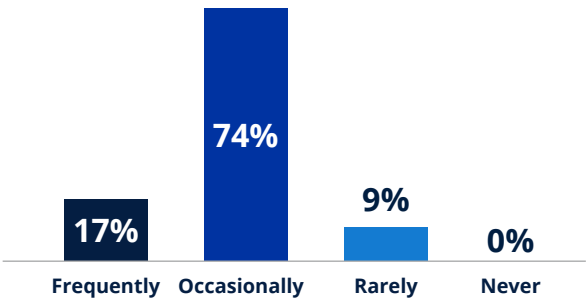
**How important is it for your company to have an efficient order-to-cash process when selling to hospitals and health systems?**



**How well does your current order-to-cash process meet your company's needs when selling to hospitals and health systems?**



**How frequently does your company experience delays or errors in the order-to-cash process when dealing with hospitals and health systems?**



More than one-third of respondents believe improving order-to-cash processes will have a significant impact on their company's performance, largely through accelerating collections and reducing operational costs.



# Automation is still highly manual

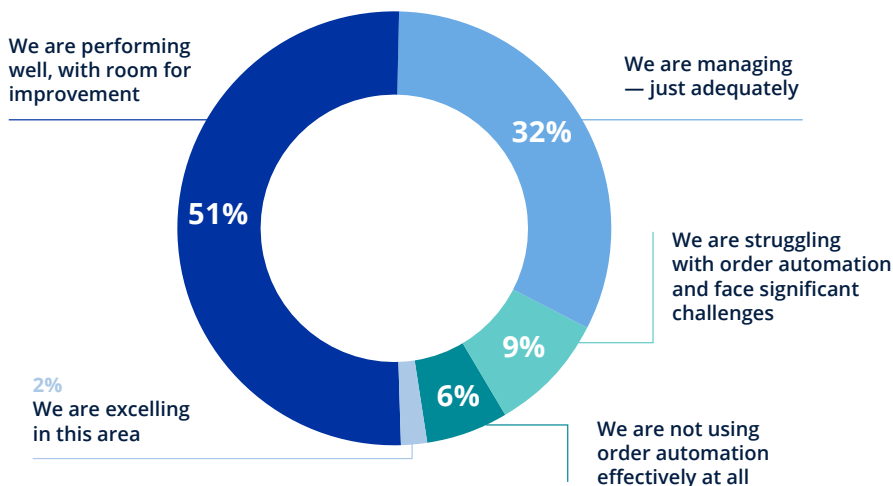
The lack of standardized processes across health system operations causes roadblocks to streamline order automation. The complexity of certain orders, like bill-only and consignment implant orders, increases the likelihood of operational errors. The resulting downstream issues on this high-spend category of products can have a bigger impact on a supplier's cash flow. Given the market is predicting an increase in the volume of FDA-approved devices, we can expect an increase in SKUs and more complex orders to manage.

Only 2% of respondents say they are excelling in order automation. Given that low percentage, it is no surprise that most of the market (89%) admits to using at least one manual process for order automation pointing to gaps where advanced technology can make significant improvements.

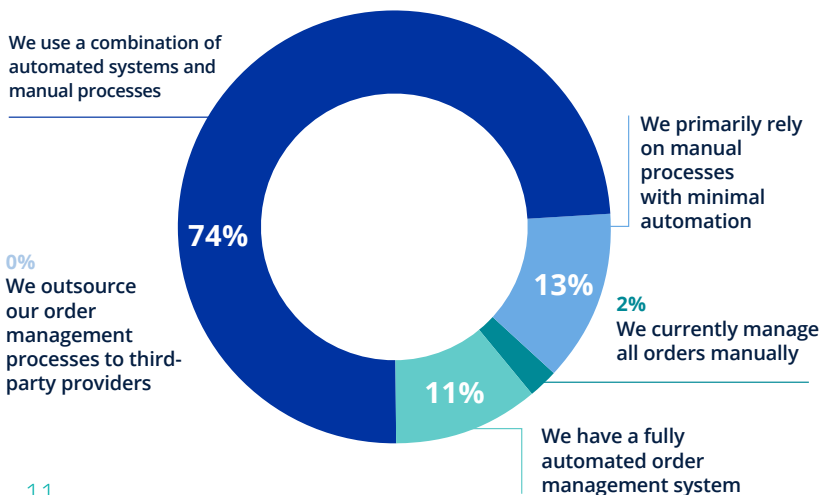
“A significant number of SKUs and configurations — as everything is complex and custom — is the biggest challenge my company faces with order automation.”

## SURVEY RESPONSE

### How well do you think your company is currently performing in order automation?



### Which of the following best describes your company's approach to managing order automation?



## Key facts

Over 40,000 new line items are introduced to provider organizations every 6 months.<sup>1</sup>

The average mid-sized health system has about 1.7 million product SKUs to manage.<sup>2</sup>

Sources:

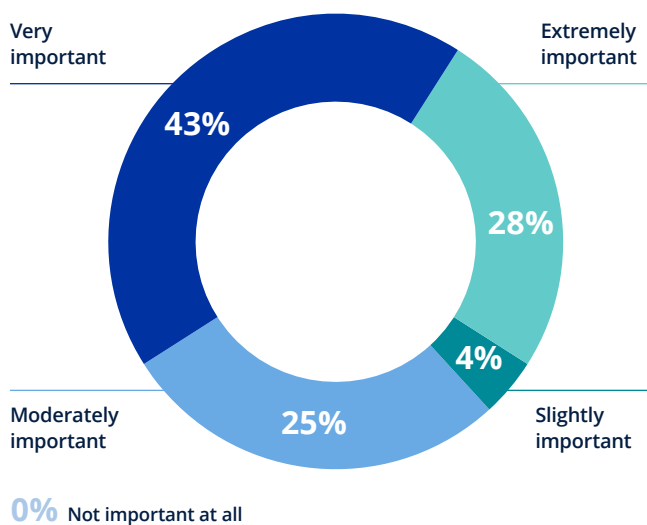
<sup>1</sup>[Healthcare Supply Chains: Six Priorities of High-Reliability Organizations](#)

<sup>2</sup>[Maximizing Your Cloud ERP Investment](#)

## Key insight

Nearly three-quarters (71%) of respondents view order automation as very or extremely important to the success of selling to health systems.

**How important is order automation to your company's overall success when selling to hospitals and health systems?**





# The first steps in the order-to-cash process are crucial

Healthcare supplier responses indicate that order automation is a crucial first step in the order-to-cash process, with transformative impacts when achieved. Those improvements span all parts of a supplier's business, from sales to accounts receivable — ultimately, yielding results that enhance the customer experience.

Within the order automation process, respondents ranked two efficiencies as those that would benefit healthcare suppliers the most: automated order entry and processing; and real-time visibility into order, invoice, and payment status. Forty-five percent of respondents believe technology can improve order fulfillment processing. In comments, respondents shared that they believe technology can reduce complexity in healthcare supplier orders, notably by simplifying product structure and standards and by streamlining consignment/serial number order submission management.

## Top areas where technology advancements could provide the most improvement to the order automation process

47%	Automating order entry and processing
47%	Enhancing real-time visibility into order, invoice and payment status
45%	Reducing manual errors in order fulfillment processing

As for benefits of adopting new technology at their specific organizations, respondents ranked reduced manual errors and increased accuracy, along with cost savings over time through increased efficiency, as their primary opportunities for enhancing the order automation process.

## What benefits do you think your company would gain from implementing technology solutions for order automation?

62%	Reduced manual errors and increased accuracy
62%	Cost savings over time through increased efficiency
53%	Improved communication and coordination with hospitals and health systems
53%	Enhanced visibility and tracking of orders in real-time
45%	Faster order processing and fulfillment
42%	Increased customer satisfaction due to faster and more reliable service
32%	Improved employee satisfaction

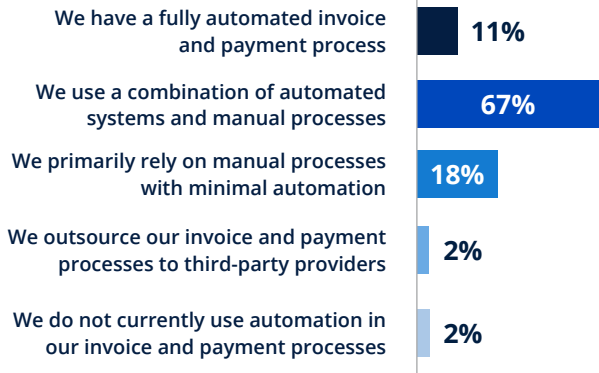
While automation for typical orders can run as high as 90%, when including order types such as bill-only and rush orders, rates can fall to 15%.

Source: *Simplify Consignment-Implant Orders with Automation*

# Enhancing process means enhancing profitability

**Invoicing and payment processes are significantly vulnerable to breakdowns without automation** on the front end of the ordering process. Gaps in automation can also impact critical processes to optimize cash flow. Currently, invoicing and payment processes are largely manual for many suppliers, with only 11% of respondents indicating they are fully automated in this area. Only 2% indicate excellent performance for invoice and payment processes today.

## Which of the following best describes your company's approach to managing invoice and payment processes?



## How well do you think your company is currently performing in managing invoice and payment processes?





Similar to order automation, respondents believe that the top areas of improvement for invoice and payment processes are reducing the risk of errors and driving operational efficiency cost savings; 62% of respondents also believe that implementing new technology would result in reduced DSO and faster payment collection.

Addressing inefficiencies of manual accounts receivable processes was overwhelmingly cited as the main priority when it comes to optimizing cash flow to reinvest.

**Considering the priority of cash flow optimization to reinvest, respondents cited the following as most important.**

**40%**  
indicated inefficiencies of manual invoicing and accounts receivable processes

**20%**  
indicated limited internal resources

Intelligent automation from order to cash is a strategic move for sustainable financial health and improving operational efficiency.

**In which areas of the invoice and payment processes do you believe technology advancements or outsourcing could provide the most improvement?**

**55%**  
indicated reducing errors and disputes in invoicing

Slower payments, resulting in high DSO for suppliers, are costly and mean there is less capital to reinvest in the business and innovative new products. That directly impacts growth potential.

**What benefits do you think your company would gain from implementing technology solutions or outsourcing for invoice and payment processes?**

- 64%** Cost savings over time through increased efficiency
- 62%** Faster payment collection / reduced DSO (Days Sales Outstanding)
- 62%** Reduced manual errors and increased accuracy
- 51%** Enhanced visibility and tracking of payments in real-time
- 49%** Improved communication and coordination with hospitals and health systems
- 36%** Increased customer satisfaction due to streamlined invoicing process

## Key insight

The average DSO for healthcare suppliers is **47 days.**

*Source: B2B Payments Innovation Readiness Feb 2021*

Managing errors and disputes in invoicing was cited as the biggest challenge healthcare suppliers face with invoice and payment processes when working with health systems.

Ultimately, the cost of not digitizing invoice and payment processes can be seen in several ways. There is the time cost of resolving invoice errors and researching invoice status by customer service and sales teams, detracting from work on more strategic business growth activities. At the same time, this can also become a source of friction with customers, creating a negative environment for future sales opportunities. In a competitive landscape where suppliers are regularly reviewed against their competition, this could become another reason to consider other suppliers.

# 58%

**of respondents identified managing errors and disputes in invoicing as the biggest challenge their company faces in the invoice and payment process when working with hospitals and health systems.**

Automation can reduce reliance on manual processes that can cause delays, add expense and create friction with customers. Automation also provides better visibility into processes which can improve cash flow predictability and reduce status inquiries, giving staff more time for strategic work.

## Key facts

**On average, 30 minutes is spent on each healthcare supply order price exception.**

*Source: Based on GHX internal statistics, industry information, and assumptions based on industry information.*

**Up to 40% of a buyer's time can be spent on order processing and exception management (such as pricing).**

*Source: Based on GHX internal statistics, industry information, and assumptions based on industry information.*



# The path to resiliency is paved in proactive strategies

Streamlining vendor credentialing compliance is essential to commercial execution. It's a strategic imperative that helps ensure smoother facility access, accelerates service readiness, and in coordination with order-to-cash automation supports consistent cash flow.

At the same time, the value of process automation across the healthcare supply chain is exponential, with quantitative and qualitative impacts that don't stop with suppliers. Ordering and billing inaccuracies and delays caused by manual processes or gaps in automation can lead to a poor customer experience that may influence future buying decisions. Complete order-to-cash automation speeds up payments, giving suppliers more cash on hand to invest in strategic growth initiatives and innovative products to improve patient outcomes.

These opportunities reveal the importance of proactive strategies around optimization in driving healthcare supply chain resiliency. Although survey respondents acknowledged recognition of the substantial financial and operational impacts from technological investments, progress remains slow.

This research shows that there's broad recognition in existing missed opportunities and a propensity to invest in innovation. It's turning that recognition into action that will propel healthcare suppliers to scale, and fund their future in an increasingly competitive, dynamic marketplace.

## Methodology

Fifty-five healthcare supply chain leaders working at laboratory supply, capital equipment, medical device, and consumable medical supply companies were surveyed. The leaders' roles spanned functional areas including sales and marketing; supply chain and e-commerce; operations; finance; customer support and customer service; and customer experience. All research was conducted in Q3 2024 and was double-blinded and conducted independently.

### Organization Type

- 71% Medical Devices
- 13% Capital Equipment
- 11% Consumable Medical Supplies
- 4% Laboratory Supplies

### Others:

Pharmaceuticals, Radiation protection garments and other ancillary products

### Function

- 42% Sales/Marketing
- 16% Supply Chain/E-Commerce
- 16% Operations
- 15% Finance
- 7% Customer Support/Customer Service
- 2% Customer Experience
- 0% IT/Technology

### Title

- 9 VP, Sales
- 7 Manager/Director of Sales/Marketing
- 6 Directors/Sr. Directors
- 5 VP, Sales and Marketing
- 5 Finance Director/VP/SVP
- 5 Director/VP of Supply Chain
- 4 Director/VP of Operations
- 3 Director of Accounts/BD
- 2 CEO/COO

### Others:

- Director of Customer Success
- Senior Manager Strategic Business Operations
- Senior Director Process Excellence
- VP, Finance Transformation

# About GHX

Building on decades of collaboration among providers, manufacturers, distributors and other industry stakeholders, Global Healthcare Exchange, LLC (GHX) is leading the charge in helping organizations run the new business of healthcare. By automating key business processes and translating evidence-based analytics and data into meaningful action, GHX is helping the healthcare ecosystem to move faster, operate more intelligently and achieve greater outcomes. With the support of GHX, healthcare organizations have removed billions of dollars of wasteful healthcare spend.

» For more information on GHX's suite of **cloud-based supply chain solutions**, visit [ghx.com](https://ghx.com) and [The Healthcare Hub](#).

## About Sage Growth Partners

Sage Growth Partners is a healthcare advisory firm with deep expertise in market research, strategy, and communications. Founded in 2005, the company's extensive domain experience ensures that healthcare organizations thrive amid the complexities of a rapidly changing marketplace. Sage Growth Partners serves clients across the full healthcare spectrum, including Ingenious Med, GE Healthcare, Medecision, and Best Buy Health.

» For more information, visit [sage-growth.com](https://sage-growth.com).

