

AI Costs: Why One in Three Companies Underestimates the Bill

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY & CORE TAKEAWAY

41% of companies now use AI in production — double last year's share. Yet 33% report higher costs than planned. The reason: budgets cover licences, not the operating costs, data preparation and integration that follow. Swiss SMEs should calculate total cost of ownership upfront, not correct it afterwards.

CONTEXT & EXECUTIVE RELEVANCE

Bitkom's 2026 survey put a hard number on what many executives already sensed: 41% of German companies now run AI in production — double the 17% share recorded a year earlier. Another 48% are planning or actively discussing deployment. Adoption is clearly accelerating. But alongside that growth sits a less comfortable pattern: 33% of companies report that actual costs came in higher than originally budgeted.

The upside is real: 77% of companies say AI has improved their competitive position, most visibly in text work (71%), marketing (53%), customer service (42%) and data analysis (31%). The technology delivers measurable value. At the same time, 19% of companies report job cuts linked to AI — a sign that automation and cost pressure are more closely linked than most budget plans account for.

CORE ACTION ITEMS

- 01 Inference at scale — per-request compute costs that can run 3 to 5 times higher than initial estimates once usage grows
- 02 Data preparation — cleaning, structuring and maintaining data, which often accounts for the largest share of total effort
- 03 Integration into existing systems — connecting AI to ERP, CRM and line-of-business applications, rarely a trivial task
- 04 Human-in-the-loop review — ongoing oversight and approval processes that remain necessary for sensitive use cases

SWISS COMPLIANCE & ARCHITECTURE GUIDELINES

- ☑ Full compliance with revised Swiss Data Protection Act (revDSG).
- ☑ Zero vendor lock-in on closed proprietary models.
- ☑ Seamless integration into Abacus, Bexio and M365 ecosystems.

Non-Binding Process Analysis

Let us review in 20 minutes where AI agents create immediate measurable efficiency in your workflows.

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