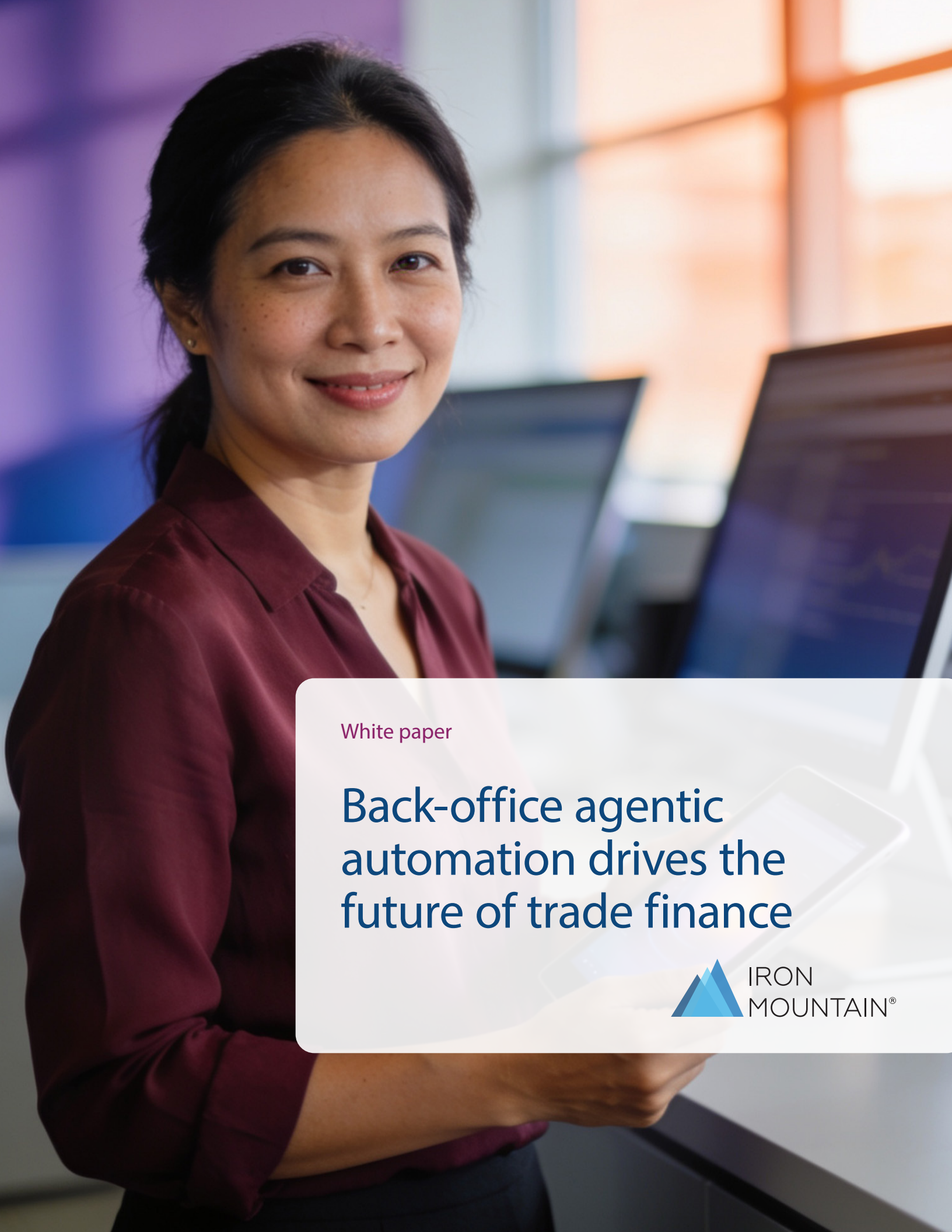

White paper

Back-office agentic automation drives the future of trade finance

IRON MOUNTAIN®

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Stepping into the new reality of trade finance

The global trade finance landscape is undergoing a structural transformation. Traditional back-office models, built on manual document handling and robotic process automation (RPA), can no longer meet the demands of modern regulatory compliance and operational speed.

This paper explores the banking sector's shift toward agentic AI—a paradigm where intelligent agents can reason, orchestrate workflows, and autonomously manage complex trade processes while maintaining human-in-the-loop governance.

What's prompting this change? It's a complex mix of geopolitical uncertainty, supply chain realignment, increasing regulatory demands, and rapid advances in AI. The stakes are high. **More than 90 percent of global trade now depends on trade finance**, according to the UN, making operational efficiency and risk management increasingly strategic differentiators for financial institutions.

Amid uncertainty, one thing is certain: Agentic AI is the next evolution in digital transformation. Outdated operations cannot keep pace with growing complexity and customer expectations. Deloitte calls the transition "a natural progression in banks' automation journey."

The opportunity is set for banks to create a new model that delivers faster processing, lower risk, and superior customer experiences.

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Critical challenges in modern trade finance

Banks and financial institutions face mounting pressures—both external and internal—that threaten their competitive edge.

Operational friction

Many firms still depend on paper documents, manual reviews, disconnected applications, and labor-intensive exception handling. **Legacy systems inflate costs and slow transaction times, turning hours into days—limiting an institution's ability to scale**. Yet, they must scale. Regional banks report that customers increasingly seek guidance on evolving trade routes, liquidity management, and sourcing strategies while demanding faster service and greater transparency. Renewed demand for trade products makes the situation even more urgent.

Regulatory complexity

Globally, markets are experiencing increased demand for efficient anti-money laundering (AML) and know your customer (KYC) screening. Institutions must analyze large volumes of documentation and monitor transactions across multiple jurisdictions. But traditional automation tools are not designed to interpret ambiguous information, adapt to regulatory changes, or reason through complex compliance scenarios.

Documentary burden

Letters of credit, bills of lading, invoices, inspection certificates, and insurance documents frequently contain inconsistencies, omissions, or formatting differences that create discrepancies and delay transactions. When organizations rely on manual processes, they aggravate these challenges. Hence, the market trend towards digitization and automation is to upgrade the slow, costly, error-prone systems that increase risk and decrease customer satisfaction.

The sustainability gap

Growing requirements for environmental, social, and governance (ESG) accountability and reporting place additional demands on financial institutions. Firms must evaluate sustainability-related information, verify supplier claims, and support financing programs tied to ESG objectives. Because much of this information resides within unstructured documents and third-party records, collecting and validating ESG-related data remains highly labor-intensive. Institutions need modern ways to aggregate, analyze, and verify at scale.

AI could help narrow the global funding gap

"AI and new digital platforms are offering alternatives to help narrow the global structural-funding gap, which exceeds US$2.5 trillion, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises in emerging markets. By improving credit assessments, reducing paperwork burdens, and enabling faster transaction processing, these tools could expand access to working capital and facilitate greater inclusion in global trade networks."

—International Banker: Global trade shifts ahead in 2026

The evolution from task automation to agentic intelligence

For years, digital transformation has focused on optical character recognition extraction and fragile, rule-based RPA. Today, agentic AI represents the next generation of digital trade processing. It builds upon machine learning and generative AI while introducing a fundamentally new level of autonomy and orchestration.

3 key advantages of agentic AI

1. Contextual reasoning enables more intelligent decisions

Unlike static bots, AI agents can interpret complex rules, including UPC 600 and ISBP 821, to identify nuances in documentation. In fact, one of the defining characteristics of agentic AI is its ability to understand context. Intelligent agents can evaluate requirements, identify discrepancies, and interpret trade rules more effectively than traditional automation tools.

Beyond simply matching fields against predefined rules, agents evaluate relationships among invoices, bills of lading, insurance certificates, and other trade documents. They identify potential discrepancies, explain findings, and route exceptions to human reviewers with supporting evidence.

This new set of capabilities enables a scalable and auditable approach to compliance—one that preserves human oversight for high-risk decisions.

From efficiency tools to intelligent operators

"This evolution signals a broader shift from cost-focused automation in banking toward intelligent process automation in financial services that supports higher-value outcomes."

—EY: How agentic automation is shaping the future of financial services

2. Workflow orchestration connects disparate processes

AI agents act as an intelligent ecosystem. They independently coordinate tasks, from ingestion and classification to validation.

In a successful IT architecture, agents become orchestrators capable of sequencing activities, enforcing routing rules, capturing provenance, and generating comprehensive audit records for every transaction. This approach allows organizations to move beyond isolated AI initiatives toward truly integrated operating models.

Agentic AI does not require core replacement

"Rather than undertaking a potentially complex and expensive overhaul, banks could introduce an intelligent conversational layer—a smart, responsive interface powered by agentic AI that works seamlessly atop banks' legacy systems."

—Deloitte: How banks can supercharge intelligent automation with agentic AI

3. Decision explainability creates trust and accountability

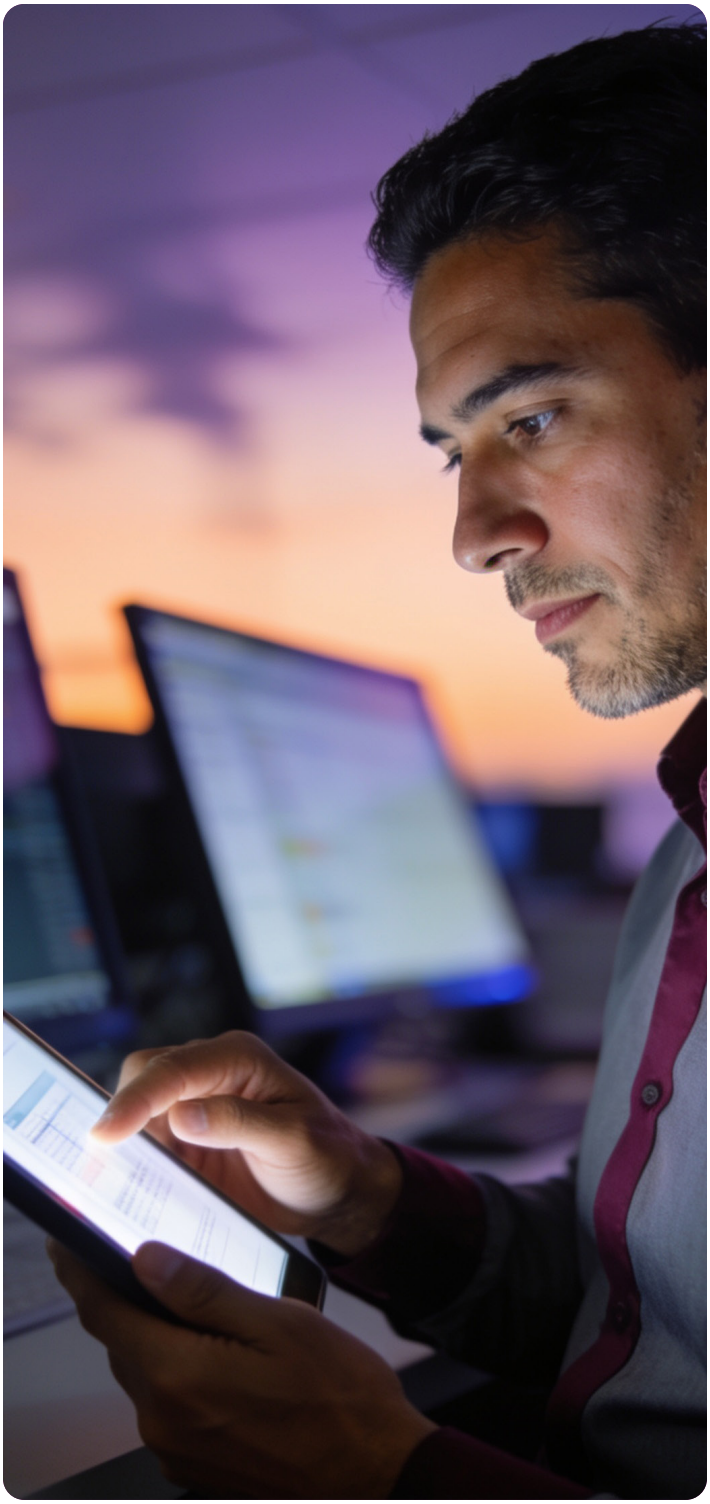
Explainability is essential. Explainable AI strengthens governance, reduces regulatory risk, and builds trust.

Intelligent agents provide clear rationales for flagged risks, making every action auditable and transparent. When agentic systems show clear evidence, all stakeholders-users, auditors, and regulators–can see how decisions were reached.

Defensibility at scale

"What truly matters is whether a bank can deliver consistent adjudication with a defensible trail, at scale, without introducing new risks."

—KPMG: Agentic AI in trade finance



Governance: AI guardrails and human-in-the-loop oversight

A governance-first architecture ensures AI remains a trusted partner. Successful AI deployments require controls, accountability mechanisms, and oversight structures—from the beginning. In practice, this includes:

AI guardrails

Strict parameters guide data access and output validation to support compliance with internal security and industry regulations. Guardrails establish confidence thresholds, escalation criteria, and monitoring mechanisms that prevent unauthorized actions to reduce operational risk.

Human-in-the-loop

Human reviewers handle high-risk approvals and sensitive legal decisions while the AI agent captures corrections to optimize the models. This division of labor allows intelligent agents to handle routine complexity while employees provide oversight and strategy. With human collaboration, AI learning systems become more effective over time.

Evidence linking

All agent-generated summaries and responses are grounded in extracted document content, with bounding-box links to source evidence. Agentic systems maintain detailed records of data sources, workflow activities, decisions, and supporting evidence. Tracing workflows back to underlying documentation strengthens transparency, supports compliance, and makes decisions defensible.

What happens when AI agents collaborate with human experts

Consider a letter of credit example. A traditional automation tool can extract shipment dates, invoice values, and consignee names from trade documents and compare them against predefined fields. An agentic AI system can go further by evaluating whether multiple documents collectively satisfy credit requirements—and flagging anomalies for human oversight.

An intelligent agent can identify discrepancies that require escalation, explain the rationale behind its findings, and generate an evidence-backed audit trail for human review.

This transforms document examination from a manual process into a collaborative workflow between human experts and intelligent agents.

Business impact and outlook

An agentic back office delivers tangible results for the global marketplace.

Efficiency gains can be significant

By automating document-intensive workflows and enabling intelligent exception management, agentic AI can dramatically reduce processing times and operational costs.

Organizations implementing agentic AI could see **efficiency improvements from 50 to 60 percent**, with labor reductions of 20 to 40 percent across portions of the trade lifecycle, according to a recent McKinsey survey.

Faster processing accelerates revenue

Firms can increase interest income—and overall competitiveness—by achieving faster turnaround times and improving limit utilization. In that same McKinsey survey, participants said they anticipate up to **80 percent cost reductions once end-to-end workflows are redesigned**.

Better intelligence mitigates risk

AI capabilities like contextual matching and network graph methods can significantly reduce false positives and negatives. As agentic systems improve sanctions screening, AML monitoring, KYC reviews, and fraud detection, compliance teams can focus on genuinely high-risk situations.

Customer experience becomes a strategic differentiator

Corporate customers increasingly expect digital experiences that provide transparency, speed, and reliability. Institutions embracing AI-driven back-office workflows will be better positioned to attract and retain clients.

Building an intelligent trade back office

Once an operational necessity, the trade finance back office can now become a competitive advantage.

As agentic AI reshapes how institutions process information, manage risk, and serve customers, **banks must move beyond isolated automation projects and embrace intelligent operating models**, those built on a strong foundation of governance, transparency, and orchestration.

The question is no longer whether agentic AI will transform trade operations, but how quickly organizations can deploy it effectively and responsibly. Those that do will be positioned to operate faster, reduce risk, improve customer experience, and unlock new growth opportunities.

That's why many financial institutions trust Iron Mountain, a company known for its superior information management and workflow automation capabilities. Today, Iron Mountain continues to build sophisticated agentic AI directly into the Iron Mountain InSight® DXP.

The transition to agentic AI is not a simple shift. It is a foundational upgrade. By combining Iron Mountain's secure information governance with its Digital Trade Back Office agentic AI, financial institutions move beyond task automation to achieve true operational autonomy.

Iron Mountain agentic AI earns industry recognition

Iron Mountain earned top marks for its agentic AI functionality, document labeling, and data privacy. The platform was noted for its successful pairing of everyday automation with advanced AI agents and reliable human-in-the-loop controls to keep data highly accurate while protecting customer privacy.

—The Forrester Wave™: Document Mining and Analytics Platforms, Q2 2026

Iron Mountain boosts efficiency, governance, and customer experience with automation and AI agents for trade finance

Iron Mountain's Digital Trade Back Office software leverages the InSight DXP platform to architect a digital workforce that transforms raw data into actionable foresight. The unified software-as-a-service (SaaS) solution is designed to streamline the trade finance journey, from document ingestion to compliance screening. By leveraging AI-powered automation, **the platform achieves over 96% data extraction accuracy**, dramatically reducing manual processing times, false positives and negatives, and operational risks.

Collaborate with intelligent agents

Iron Mountain's growing library of specialized agents supports the unique needs of trade finance.

- **Trade Finance Digitalization agent:** Automates ingestion, classification, splitting, re-ordering, and intelligent extraction.
- **Trade Finance Fraud Check agent:** Orchestrates specialized agents to detect forged documents, screen sanctions risks, and determine transaction compliance.
- **Trade Finance Corporate Vetting agent:** Automate trade document examination using regulatory reasoning and intelligent analysis to identify genuine discrepancies.

Financial institutions are overcoming challenges to achieve end-to-end efficiency gains, governance, and customer satisfaction. Learn more about the business benefits of Iron Mountain Digital Trade Back Office or book a discovery demo session today.

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About Iron Mountain

Iron Mountain Incorporated (NYSE: IRM), founded in 1951, is the global leader for storage and information management services. Trusted by more than 225,000 organizations around the world, and with a real estate network of more than 98 million square feet across more than 1,400 facilities in over 60 countries, Iron Mountain stores and protects billions of information assets, including critical business information, highly sensitive data, and cultural and historical artifacts. Providing solutions that include secure storage, information management, digital transformation, secure destruction, as well as data centers, art storage and logistics, and cloud services, Iron Mountain helps organizations lower cost and risk, comply with regulations, recover from disaster, and enable a more digital way of working. Visit www.ironmountain.com for more information.

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