



• ARCHITECTURE NOTES · RESOURCE

Why outcome pricing wins now

Billable hours cannot price outcomes. Three structural changes finally made outcome pricing work in practice.

Companion to: [Why outcome pricing wins now, and what it requires structurally.](#)



Why this matters

Hourly billing was invented when execution was the constraint. Talented humans were scarce, clients paid for time because time was what they could verify, and the rate served as a proxy for input cost. That equation has shifted. The agencies losing ground today are not losing on talent; they are losing on cost structure. This deck is for agency leaders deciding whether to re-architect around outcomes, and for buyers trying to read which side of the transition a vendor is actually on.

- Why hourly billing existed in the first place
- The three changes that made outcome pricing viable
- What a real outcome architecture looks like
- How to read a halfway transition before signing



The three structural changes

01 **Drafters got good**

Voice-aware models can now produce parity-quality copy for repeated tasks: posts, emails, briefs, decks. The bar moved from "can a model write" to "can a model write in your brand voice consistently enough to ship without a human rewrite." The answer flipped to yes recently. Most

02 **Observability got cheap**

Output quality is now monitorable at the per-artifact level. Voice gates, sentiment scans, dead-link checks. What used to take a senior reviewer is a line of code in the dispatch path. The QA function moved into the pipeline.

03 **Orchestration got reliable**

Tools like n8n made it possible to chain agents into a workflow without hiring a backend team. The integration tax that used to sink small agencies has been paid down by the platform vendors. Multi-step automation stopped being a custom build.

04 **The combined effect**

These three together made outcome pricing viable in practice. An agency can now commit to a fixed monthly cadence (on-brand and on-schedule) and actually hit it without scaling headcount linearly with output. The cost line decouples from the production line.



Hourly architecture vs. outcome architecture

Hourly architecture

- Rate as a proxy for input cost
- Headcount scales linearly with output
- QA is a senior reviewer at the end of the pipeline
- Integration is a custom backend project per client
- Adding AI services is a sticker, not a re-architecture
- Cost structure stays roughly fixed against output

Outcome architecture

- Price bound to a structural deliverable
- Headcount flat as cadence climbs
- QA is in the dispatch path: voice gates, scans, checks
- Orchestration via platform vendors, paid as a SaaS line
- Architecture re-built around outcomes from the ground up
- Cost structure compresses every quarter it stays unchanged



Illustrative cost-line shape

01 The variables

Pick your own numbers. R is monthly retainer. H is senior hours per month required to ship the cadence. S is senior hourly cost. P is platform and orchestration cost per month. The illustration is variable-only, not a real engagement.

02 Hourly-architecture monthly cost

Roughly H times S , plus a thin platform line. As cadence climbs, H climbs with it. Margin is thin and headcount-bound. The agency runs hot at the senior layer because that is where the QA pressure lands.

03 Outcome-architecture monthly cost

Roughly H -prime times S plus P , where H -prime is materially smaller because drafters and observability handle the repeatable layer. Cadence can climb without H -prime climbing. P is bounded by SaaS pricing.

04 Why it compounds

Quarter on quarter, an outcome architecture stays at H -prime while an hourly competitor adds H to keep up with cadence. Same brand voice, same deliverable, different cost line. The structural advantage is not patched in. It is the architecture.



How to re-architect, not bolt on

- **Lock the brand voice as a written specification**

A document the team agrees on. The spec becomes the input to every drafter and the audit standard for every review. Without this, drafter quality is a coin flip per output.

- **Install observability in the dispatch path**

Voice gates, sentiment scans, link checks. Drafts that fail get rewritten automatically; drafts that fail repeated rewrites park for manual edit. One engineer-day, paid back the first time.

- **Pick orchestration before agents**

A platform like n8n carries the integration tax. Trying to chain agents without it puts you back in the custom-backend hole.

- **Re-shape the offer**

Move the price line from rates to packages. Each package binds to a structural deliverable, not a number of hours. The page stops listing rates.

- **Move pricing, ops, hiring, and software together**

Halfway transitions tend to be worse than no transition. Hire to the new architecture, not to the old one with AI bolted on.

- **Refuse the line item temptation**

Adding "AI services" to an hourly retainer keeps the old cost structure and just adds risk. Either re-architect or do not.



When this is wrong (anti-patterns)

01 You skipped the voice spec

Outcome pricing assumes the deliverable will be on-brand. Without a spec the scanner has nothing to enforce, and silent register drift quietly breaks the cadence. Fix this first or do not commit to outcomes.

02 Drafters tested too early

Models were not parity-quality on brand voice until recently. Agencies that tried in 2023 and gave up may have a stale prior. The answer flipped to yes; re-test before deciding the model is the bottleneck.

03 AI as a new line item

Adding AI services on top of an hourly cost structure does not change the cost structure. It adds a sticker to it. The structural advantage does not appear.

04 Halfway transition

Pricing changed but ops did not, or ops changed but hiring did not. The cost line doubles without the structural benefit. Either commit to the re-architecture or stay hourly cleanly.



Arthea outcome packages (verbatim from the article)

SYSTEM AUDIT

EUR 2,900

Bound to a structural deliverable, not hours. Scope: /websites-cro and /email-and-sms.

ARCHITECTURE BUILD

from EUR 5,500

A structural deliverable. The build, not the build hours.

PERFORMANCE PARTNERSHIP

EUR 3,900 / mo

Monthly cadence committed; output bound to outcomes per month.

RETENTION ARCHITECTURE

EUR 5,000 / mo

Bound to a structural deliverable, never to a number of hours.



How to read a vendor before signing

- **Look at the price page, not the pitch**

Rate cards mean hourly architecture underneath. Outcome packages bound to structural deliverables mean the cost line is decoupled from hours. The page is the receipt.

- **Ask what runs in the dispatch path**

If the answer is "a senior reviewer," output quality is a person, not a system. If the answer names voice gates, sentiment scans, and link checks, observability is real.

- **Ask about brief schema**

A vendor without a brief schema is doing per-output strategist work. That cost stays in the model regardless of pricing label. The schema is the tell.

- **Ask how cadence scales without headcount**

If the answer requires hiring at the production layer, the architecture is hourly with new branding. Outcome architecture answers this with platform and observability, not headcount.

- **Read the offer page for "AI services" line items**

A new line item bolted onto an hourly retainer is the halfway-transition tell. The cost structure underneath has not changed. Expect the structural advantage to not appear.



- NEXT STEP

Outcome pricing is the cost structure, not the line item.

Re-architect pricing, ops, hiring, and software together. The agencies that survive the transition are the ones that move all four. Halfway is worse than not at all.

[Read the full architecture note ->](#)