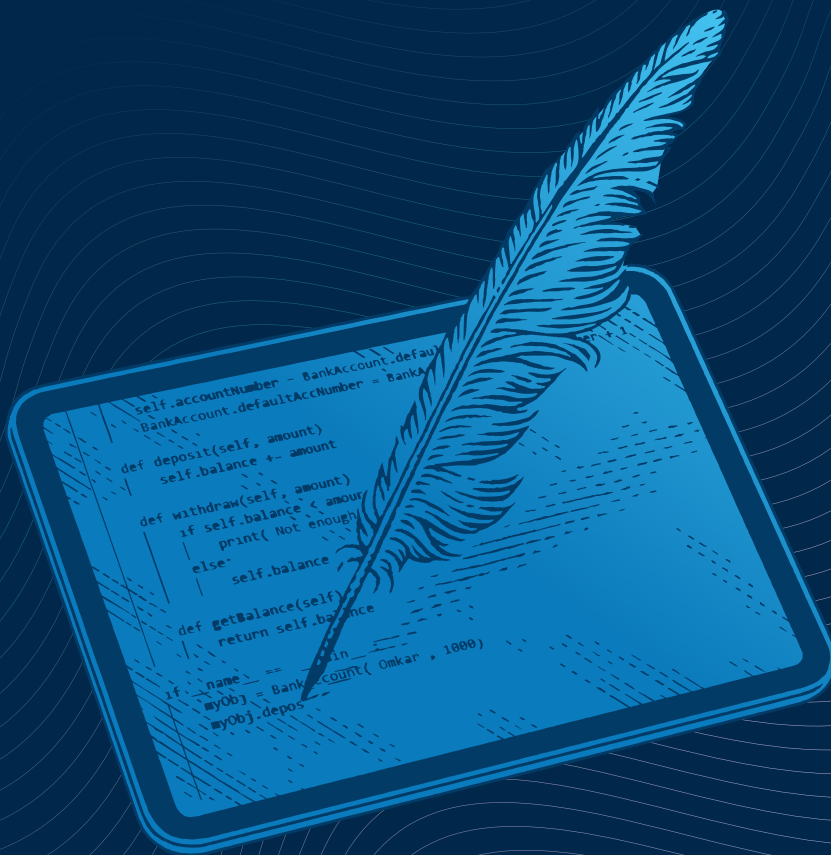




FINTech PREDICTIONS

2026



```
self.accountNumber = BankAccount.defaultAccountNumber
self.defaultAccountNumber = BankAccount.defaultAccountNumber

def deposit(self, amount):
    self.balance += amount

def withdraw(self, amount):
    if self.balance < amount:
        print("Not enough")
    else:
        self.balance -= amount

def getBalance(self):
    return self.balance

# Create an instance of BankAccount
myObj = BankAccount("Omkar", 1000)
myObj.deposit(500)
```

How will AI shake up financial services? Will an increased risk of fraud change how products are built?

Plaid Co-founder and CEO Zach Perret shares his predictions for 2026.

Last year, fraud moved to the top of the agenda, while artificial intelligence shifted from novelty to infrastructure. In 2026, the effects of that transition will take center stage.

From AI becoming a primary interface for financial decisions to fraud reshaping risk management and new financial products testing the boundaries of trust and automation, the coming year will be defined by how the industry responds to new realities.

FEATURING

ZACH PERRET, CO-FOUNDER & CEO, PLAID

WILL ROBINSON, CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER, PLAID

MICHELLE YOUNG, CREDIT PRODUCT LEAD, PLAID

Watch the [full conversation](#) for a deeper look at this year's predictions.

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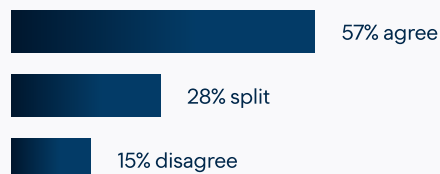
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01

AI chat becomes the default front door for consumer finance

More consumers will start their financial journeys using conversational AI to explore questions, understand their money, and get guidance before taking action.

Industry take¹



From novelty to natural interface

For the past couple of years, AI chat has been positioned as the future interface for finance, though it rarely worked well enough to matter. Early chatbots were rigid and easily confused, making them frustrating rather than helpful.

That's changing fast. Large language models have dramatically improved chat's ability to understand context, handle nuance, and respond in ways that feel genuinely useful. As a result, conversational interfaces are starting to feel less like a novelty and more like a natural means to interact with complex systems, including money.

¹Industry takes are based on audience polling collected during Plaid's Fintech Predictions 2026 live webinar in December 2025. Poll responses reflect the views of webinar participants at the time of the event and are not intended to represent the views of the broader fintech industry. Results are directional in nature and should not be interpreted as statistically representative research.

In 2026, a growing number of consumers will turn to chat (whether through general-purpose AI tools or chats embedded in financial apps) as their first step in finance. They'll use it to ask questions, explore tradeoffs, and better understand their financial situation.

That said, when it comes to moving money, opening an account, or taking out a loan, verification and clear user intent still matter. This will make the near-term model a hybrid one: chat for guidance and understanding, followed by explicit user confirmation for any financial action.

“ Having an assistant that actually acts like an assistant is so powerful. It is such a natural way for humans to want to interact.

WILL ROBINSON, CTO, PLAID

Why it matters

As conversational AI becomes a more common entry point into financial decision-making, it lowers the barrier for people to engage with their money.

AI chat interfaces make it easier to ask questions, build understanding, and gain confidence, especially for consumers unsure of where to start. And once chat proves useful in one moment, it often becomes a habit.

In 2026, that stickiness is what will turn these interfaces from an experiment into a meaningful entry point for consumer finance.

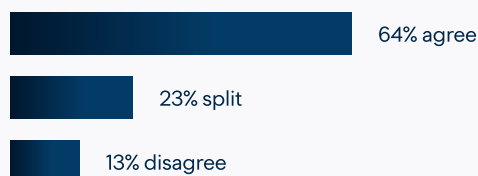
“ As soon as you use AI chat for one use case that works really well, you get curious and start trying others. It's very, very sticky.

ZACH PERRET, CO-FOUNDER & CEO, PLAID

02 The heaviest use of AI in fintech comes from fraudsters, not fintechs

The fastest and most impactful uses of AI in financial services will come from fraudsters, forcing banks and fintechs to play defense in an uneven arms race.

Industry take



When innovation outpaces implementation

AI is a productivity boost for companies. In 2026, however, it will also be a productivity boost for bad actors.

Unlike banks and fintechs, which must move through procurement, compliance checks, and legal requirements designed to protect customers, bad actors can move fast, adopting new tools instantly and testing them at scale. With AI, those experiments are also cheap and repeatable.

As a result, many fraud tactics that once required time, coordination, or technical skill are now cheap and scalable. Creating fake IDs, generating convincing audio or video, and running large-scale social engineering schemes can now be done faster and at lower cost than ever before.

This dynamic is creating a temporary but meaningful imbalance. In the near term, fraudsters are likely to leverage AI at a greater volume than fintechs, using it to probe systems, impersonate real users, and exploit gaps across onboarding, account recovery, and payments.

“ The cost to commit fraud has gotten really cheap. And fraud-fighting tools have not reacted fast enough to push that cost back up.

ZACH PERRET, CO-FOUNDER & CEO, PLAID

Why it matters

For financial institutions, this shift changes how risk shows up.

Fraud is no longer confined to a single team or moment in the user journey. Instead, it increasingly affects how financial service providers think about onboarding, account funding, and user experience from the very beginning.

“ AI expands the mandate around fraud. It’s no longer just a fraud or risk team problem—it brings product and engineering into the conversation much earlier.

MICHELLE YOUNG, CREDIT LEAD, PLAID

03 Credit scores are unbundled

More lenders will move beyond a single, all-purpose credit score by using cash flow and other signals to better understand a borrower's ability to repay.

Industry take



Evolving past a number

For decades, credit decisions have revolved around one primary input: a generalized credit score. While that score has been useful, it was designed for an era when financial products were fewer, data was more limited, and lending models prioritized simplicity over precision.

That world no longer matches how people manage money. In 2026, more lenders (especially those outside of traditional mortgage lending) will treat the single bundled score as one signal of creditworthiness, rather than *the* signal. As a result, credit assessment will become a blend of inputs that reflect real financial behavior.

Cash flow data sits at the center of this shift. It offers a more current view of financial health, capturing what's happening now rather than summarizing past behavior alone. As lending products diversify and consumer financial lives become more complex, this kind of real-time context becomes harder to ignore.

That doesn't mean traditional credit scores will disappear. Instead, they will continue to be used as one input among many, and not as a single source of truth. The result will be a more flexible, more nuanced approach to assessing risk.

“ A credit score doesn't necessarily tell me whether a borrower is able to pay in the future—and as a lender, I care more about that.

ZACH PERRET, CO-FOUNDER & CEO, PLAID

Why it matters

Unbundling credit scores allows lenders to make more informed and inclusive decisions.

By looking beyond a single number, lenders can better assess real repayment ability, particularly for consumers whose financial lives don't fit neatly into traditional credit models. At the same time, this shift raises the bar for modeling, fairness, and transparency, as decisions rely on a broader and (at times) less complete set of data.

In 2026, the lenders that succeed won't be the ones with the most data, but those who use the right signals, in the right way, to understand borrowers more accurately and responsibly.

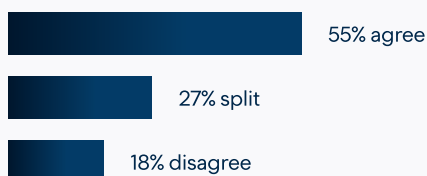
“ More sophisticated lenders are going to use multiple scores and signals.

MICHELLE YOUNG, CREDIT LEAD, PLAID

04 We see the first self-driving money apps

For a meaningful group of consumers, the first wave of self-driving money apps will move beyond experiments to handle routine financial tasks automatically.

Industry take



From manual management to delegated decisions

For most people, managing money still means a long list of manual tasks: paying bills, moving funds between accounts, deciding how much to save, and figuring out what to invest. Even with modern apps, the burden largely falls on the consumer to initiate and manage each step.

In 2026, a new class of self-driving money apps will start gaining traction, designed to automatically handle these financial tasks. Many consumers will find the idea enticing: they will set goals, constraints, and risk tolerance once, then let the system handle the rest.

“ A lot of people are really comfortable with this... And it's the kind of thing that spreads really quickly through word of mouth.

WILL ROBINSON, CTO, PLAID

Many more, however, will remain hesitant to allow financial decisions to be made on their behalf. Adoption, therefore, will likely start with a smaller, less risk-averse segment before expanding more broadly.

In parallel, real edge cases will need to be considered. Automatic decisions can have unintended consequences, especially when they affect credit, liquidity, or long-term financial outcomes. And delegation without guardrails can quickly create new problems instead of solving old ones.

Why it matters

Self-driving money apps represent a shift in how consumers relate to their finances: from constant decision-making to delegation.

For people who adopt them, these products reduce cognitive load, freeing them from day-to-day decisions and helping ensure that good financial habits happen automatically, not just when someone remembers to act. When they work well, they can turn intent into execution.

At the same time, these apps raise the bar for transparency and trust. Consumers need to understand what decisions are being made on their behalf and retain the ability to step in when needed. The most successful products won't remove users from the loop entirely; instead, they'll give them confidence that the system is working in their best interest.

While their arrival won't mean mass adoption, it will be proof that consumers are willing to delegate real financial decisions—and that money management can move from manual to automatic.

“

I think there's an opportunity where a decision has been made, but you approve it. I just worry about the unintended consequences of an automatic decision.

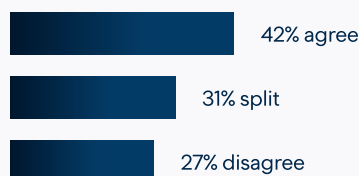
MICHELLE YOUNG, CREDIT LEAD, PLAID

05

Neobanks choose to launch using stablecoins rather than traditional banks

A growing share of new neobanks will launch on stablecoin rails as their core financial infrastructure, prioritizing flexibility and speed over traditional banking rails.

Industry take



A different starting point

For years, fintech founders faced a stark choice: build on top of the traditional banking system or operate entirely outside of it. Both paths came with heavy tradeoffs: either regulatory complexity and slow iteration, or limited functionality and challenges to consumer trust.

In 2026, that binary will begin to break down. A growing number of new neobanks will launch on stablecoins, using blockchain-based infrastructure as their foundation rather than as an add-on. This doesn't mean abandoning compliance or consumer protections; it means starting from a different place.

“ There’s a huge design spectrum between offshore crypto wallets and becoming a maximally regulated bank on day one, and more of that spectrum is now on the table.

WILL ROBINSON, CTO, PLAID

Stablecoins offer faster settlement, global reach, and programmable money. For builders, they also open up room to experiment, especially as regulatory frameworks become clearer and more permissive, creating opportunity between fully regulated banks and fully self-custodial crypto products.

Why it matters

Stablecoin-first neobanks signal a shift in how financial products get built.

For fintech teams, this model can reduce dependency on legacy constraints, making it easier to iterate and launch globally. For the broader industry, it introduces competitive pressure, challenging assumptions about settlement speed, cross-border payments, and what “banking infrastructure” really means.

Still, adoption won’t be automatic, as consumer understanding and trust remain major hurdles. Concepts like custody, insurance, and dispute resolution still matter, and they’re less intuitive outside traditional banking frameworks. As a result, early adoption is likely to skew toward specific use cases or more sophisticated users rather than the mass market.

In 2026, the biggest differentiator won’t be the rails themselves, but the trust layer: the teams that make stablecoin infrastructure feel as safe, legible, and recoverable as traditional banking while preserving the speed and flexibility that make it attractive in the first place.

“

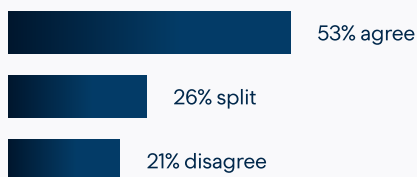
There will be those who are very well embedded in this space who will love this. But for normal usage, it will be hard for a consumer to truly understand.

MICHELLE YOUNG, CREDIT LEAD, PLAID

06 Lenders are more worried about fraud than delinquency

Many lenders will focus less on long-term repayment risk and more on preventing fraudulent loans from being funded at all.

Industry take



A change in how risk shows up

For years, delinquency has been the primary lens through which lenders measured risk. Metrics like 60- or 90-day delinquency rates helped institutions understand portfolio health and compare performance across lenders.

Today, as fraud grows increasingly sophisticated and prevalent, lenders are paying closer attention to what happens before the loan is funded. That shifts the key question from “*will the borrower repay over time?*” to “*is the borrower even real?*”

More and more, lenders are seeing a clear dividing line. Borrowers who make their first payment are often manageable, even if they later need flexibility. Those who miss that first payment are far more likely to be fraudulent—and far less likely to repay anything at all.

It's a change that reflects fraud's evolution. With AI making it easier to create fake identities and scale attacks, fraudulent loans are more likely to fail immediately rather than gradually. As a result, early signals that can prevent bad loans from ever being funded are becoming more important than long-term delinquency curves.

That doesn't mean delinquency concerns will disappear. Economic conditions still matter, and a change in interest rates or employment could quickly bring repayment risk back into focus. But under current conditions, fraud will command more attention from risk teams than it has in the past.

“ If the borrower misses the first payment, that's a fraudster. And they're never going to get a dollar of that loan back.

ZACH PERRET, CO-FOUNDER & CEO, PLAID

Why it matters

This shift changes how lenders design products, workflows, and risk checks.

With fraud the dominant concern, prevention must happen earlier. As a result, identity verification, onboarding signals, and sophisticated fraud detection carry more weight, while reliance on downstream collections and portfolio management will be reduced. This means fraud, credit, product, and engineering teams will increasingly need to work together, as early decisions will determine whether a loan is viable at all.

Ultimately, the lenders best positioned to manage risk won't be the ones with the most sophisticated delinquency models, but those that can detect fraud quickly, raise the cost of committing it, and stop bad loans before they're funded.

“ Fraud and credit are becoming much more intertwined. Understanding who someone is earlier in the process is going to be a huge factor for lenders.

MICHELLE YOUNG, CREDIT LEAD, PLAID



Stay ahead in 2026

2026 promises to be another year of exciting evolution for fintech. Whatever happens, Plaid is focused on helping you onboard more users, create better financial experiences, and mitigate fraud.

Watch the full [Fintech Predictions 2026 conversation](#) for more insights.