OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF AP INVOICING IN ORACLE® E-BUSINESS SUITE SYSTEMS

How to Increase Profit & Productivity via Automated Processing
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INTRODUCTION:
STATE OF ACCOUNTS PAYABLE TODAY

In today’s increasingly high-tech and efficiency driven business landscape, internal processes such as accounts payable (AP) are being looked to as prime candidates for modernization. Traditional, paper-based methods of AP invoice processing are associated with higher costs, lower visibility and longer processing times — all barriers that ultimately impede business progress and the ability to gain a competitive advantage.

However, the pains of manual AP invoice processing are felt far beyond the AP department. CFOs considering the bottom line see a waste of money on high processing costs. Buyers looking to receive early payment discounts often miss out due to inefficiency. The AP department itself has difficulty responding to supplier inquiries because of low-visibility paper invoices. CEOs consider the high capital and material costs of manual processing, which can drain valuable resources from the company. Finally, the suppliers want to work with companies that pay bills on time and correctly: a difficult task when processing invoices manually.

Doesn’t My Oracle® E-Business Suite Application Already Offer a Solution?

The thought may have crossed your mind: doesn’t my Oracle E-Business Suite system vendor already offer something that could eliminate these challenges? The answer is, even though vendors are constantly updating for the better, the added features offered by a best-in-class automation solution (e.g., data capture, OCR, analytics and audit trail, etc.) are simply not a priority — particularly for the bigger, license-based systems.

An Oracle E-Business Suite system is a great tool for streamlining the process of cutting checks and making payments, but there are numerous “pain points” which it does not address. A good way to identify what’s lacking is to ask yourself, do you have:

- Staff dedicated to manually sorting and handling paper invoices?
- Excess paper, transportation and physical archiving expenses?
- Trouble accurately capturing data regardless of invoice format?
- Low visibility of invoice processing and approval status from the moment the invoice is received?
- Limited analytics, reporting and audit trail capabilities?
- Frustrations in trying to connect accounting and procurement functions?
- Difficulty taking advantage of early payment discounts?
- Poor oversight of spending with both PO- and non-PO-based suppliers?

If you can answer “yes” to any of the above questions, there’s a good chance your Oracle E-Business Suite application could benefit from enhancement. An AP invoice automation solution helps fills in these gaps and drive greater value organization wide.

Is Automation the Answer?

Despite the fact most organizations understand the detriments of manual AP processing and an Oracle E-Business Suite system are commonly used to standardize internal functions, AP remains inundated with paper. In fact, according to a recent study by The Institute of Financial Operations (IFO), a majority of 100 AP professionals surveyed (39%) said paper-based invoices still make up 90% or more of their total volume.¹

Why are so many skeptical about solving the problem using automation? In general, the intricate workflow and procedures within AP cause some businesses to worry that automation is too complex and expensive to integrate with Oracle E-Business Suite. According to the same IFO study, survey respondents revealed their top three concerns about AP automation (specifically, cloud-based solutions) to be integration issues, security issues and total cost of ownership.

The purpose of this white paper is to explore the specific challenges faced by companies using manual processing methods while shedding light on the key features and proven benefits of automation. Like many organizations seeking ways to improve AP, you may discover that integrating an automation solution within an Oracle E-Business Suite application can not only streamline every phase of AP operations, but propel your business to the next level of maturity and modernization.

CHALLENGES OF MANUAL AP INVOICE PROCESSING

Accounts payable departments all share similar objectives in their quest to achieve and maintain success. Overarching goals commonly include: ensuring accurate and timely closings of invoicing operations, avoiding late payment fees, capturing early payment discounts, minimizing vendor disputes, and keeping the supply chain running smoothly.

The problems start when AP personnel have to spend too much time on low-value tasks like scrambling to enter invoices in the Oracle E-Business Suite system, hunting down the necessary signatures for payment approval and retrieving paper documents from file cabinets. While this paper chase used to be tolerated, today's businesses simply cannot afford to miss out on savings or put their credit ratings or regulatory compliance standings at risk.

Top 5 Obstacles Preventing AP Success

In Esker’s experience, there are five primary obstacles associated with manual AP invoice processing standing in the way of AP departments accomplishing their goals:

- **Slow invoice processing time:**
  Manual routing, processing and sign-off procedures slow down the purchase-to-pay (P2P) cycle, which make it difficult to capture early payment discounts, lead to late payment penalties, and can even damage relationships with your suppliers.

- **Reduced accuracy:**
  Risk of error is inherent in any process involving paper and manual data entry. This is especially critical in AP because of the impact on working capital and the fact that transactions are subject to scrutiny by external audits for regulatory compliance.

- **High costs per invoice:**
  Processing errors require resolution, which drives up the cost per invoice. A study by Aberdeen Group found respondents using electronic AP processing methods processed their invoices 63% cheaper than those doing so manually.²

- **Lack of visibility:**
  Quick access to information on whether an invoice has been received, processed or paid brings a level of stability, control and oversight that is absent in a manual system. Visibility also makes it easier for companies to assess AP operations and develop necessary strategies for improvement.

- **Difficult data retrieval:**
  From audits to vendor inquiries, finding information quickly can be virtually impossible when invoices are stored and retrieved manually. The cost of storing physical invoices in the office or in off-site warehouses can also add up quickly.

Measuring Performance: Importance of Benchmarking and KPIs

Benchmarking is a vital aspect of improving your AP business practices: You can’t manage what you can’t measure. Therefore, it is critical to decide which Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) align best with your organization’s goals, and use them as a guide to periodically evaluate how you compare to your chosen benchmarks.

Examples of good KPIs to measure include:

- Number of documents processed per month or per employee
- Processing cost of each invoice
- Number of invoices that may automatically process
- Timeliness of payments
- Discounts captured due to early payments
- Number of suppliers
- Level of automation already implemented

OVERCOMING AP CHALLENGES WITH END-TO-END AUTOMATION

Automation is a proven tool for overcoming the challenges of traditional AP processes, but a successful outcome hinges on the effectiveness of the strategy. An end-to-end automation solution that seamlessly integrates with Oracle E-Business Suite is ideal for not only addressing the AP department’s concerns, but the larger goals of the business as a whole — leaving no issue unaddressed.

What matters to an AP department is not always what matters to CFOs or other members of management. According to a recent study by The Accounts Payable Network (TAPN), the top concerns of AP departments are improving processes, reducing errors, managing time and improving productivity, while visibility of payables and spend analysis (two pertinent issues for CFOs) ranked at the bottom.3

Conflicting interests are never a good recipe for business success. By taking an end-to-end approach to automation, all parties get what they want because the goals of everyone involved are aligned and encapsulated into a single, strategic approach.

How Esker’s Accounts Payable Automation Solution Works

Esker’s Accounts Payable automation solution integrates with the Oracle E-Business Suite application, allowing you to automate every phase of AP invoice processing — from reception of the original document to the creation of an accounting book entry — for streamlined AP management. With end-to-end automation capabilities, businesses can address the challenges of manual data entry and routing along with the lack of coordination and transparency within traditional AP invoice processing.

Document capture. Locally or centrally received paper invoices are scanned and immediately sent to Esker for processing according to predefined rules matched to invoice attributes (e.g., supplier, amount, buying entity, etc.). Scanned or electronic documents are captured and can be automatically routed and prioritized.

Intelligent data extraction verification and validation. Using intelligent capture, Esker extracts relevant invoice information such as company name, invoice number, due date and line item details. Esker relies on automated data verification, data validity checks and invoice balance computation to accurately extract data. Captured data can be automatically checked using 2-way or 3-way matching against an existing purchase order (PO). If no exception is detected, touchless processing can create the invoice for payment without the need for user validation. Non-PO invoices can undergo multi-level review, coding and multi-level approval. If the capture isn't 100% accurate at first, Esker Teach functionality can be used to “teach” the solution how to better recognize data for similar invoices in the future.

Exception handling. If an exception such as price/quantity mismatch occurs, the invoice can be blocked for payment pending validation and approval via an electronic workflow that can be set up to go through one or several users.

Payment approval. Once the data is validated, either automatically or by a user, the invoice is posted in the Oracle E-Business Suite application, and the document image is indexed to the Esker server or another archive. Users can be notified of invoice entry and status.

Invoice creation and document archiving. When audit time comes, or in case of a dispute over the invoice, the original document image, corresponding audit trail and history of modifications are readily available to authorized users for consultation at any time.

Keep an Eye on the Pulse of Your Business

Your current system may allow you to see what was paid, but Esker gives you instant access to what invoices are in the pipeline. This type of enhanced control and monitoring allows everyone involved to better forecast the use of cash and determine the best approach for capturing early payment discounts.

Esker dashboards provide every user with readily available information needed to perform daily tasks, monitor performances, and spot problems or opportunities as soon as they arise. Packaged KPIs and dashboards remove all possible headaches for IT. Looking for additional, more specific indicators? Esker makes it simple: The easy-to-use interface allows you to choose what you want to display and to which user or profile. And, you are free to remove, edit or add other indicators to your dashboards.

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Measure efficiency, resolve issues and accurately forecast

Reports can be run or scheduled to see how many pending invoices are waiting to be processed and how much cash they account for. Reports for invoices pending approval, invoices by status, number of invoices processed by full-time employees, etc. can be run from the web interface, along with the option to build your own reports. You can also automatically provide regular reporting to your managers, only needing to define when, at what frequency, and to whom a report be automatically emailed.
Get peace of mind regarding Sarbanes-Oxley Act compliance

Esker keeps a complete audit trail of every manual touch point within vendor invoice processing, giving you insights into “who did what, when and where,” with the ability to monitor whether or not the proper checks and validations took place.

Modifications history helps you quickly identify the user who made changes to an invoice should questions about the change arise. A record of all users’ invoice data changes is kept; no modifications can be made without leaving a trace.

Keep track of all invoices — boost vendor satisfaction

Because all invoices are visible as soon as they arrive, and easily tracked from receipt to posting to payment, you can immediately respond to payment status calls from vendors.

Approve Invoices on the Go

Available 24/7 from Apple or Android devices, Esker’s mobile invoice and requisition approval application, Esker Anywhere, offers added dimension of convenience for on-the-go approvers who need to review and validate supplier invoices at a moment’s notice. Approvers can use the mobile app to:

- **View invoice lists**: Get instant visibility and oversight into pending invoices, and view the list of invoices awaiting approval, invoices on hold, etc.

- **View invoice images**: Quickly check and review the image of the invoice received by the accounting department.

- **Instantly access key data**: Looking for a supplier name? Total amount? Access the key data you need instantly, including comments from previous approvers.

- **Review coding information before approving**: Want to approve coding information as well as payment? Click on the total to review GL and cost center allocations for each invoice line.

- **Approve, hold or send back**: Approve, put on hold or send an invoice back to the previous approver or AP officer, with the option of writing a comment at each step. The capability to approve numerous pending invoices at once is also available.
Unifying Workflow in Multiple ERP Instances

When considering AP automation, businesses running an Oracle E-Business Suite application basically have two choices — install a tool inside the system or use a compliant solution with data recognition, validation and workflow residing externally. Integrating a solution that runs AP workflow inside the Oracle E-Business Suite system might seem like the most straightforward approach, but many companies ultimately choose an external solution due to several factors.

For example, companies running several ERP/business applications within the organization must maintain “inside workflow” in each instance. This can cause inefficiencies, additional costs and consistency issues over time. Unaffected by changes such as an upgrade to a new version, web-based AP workflow outside of Oracle E-Business Suite helps maintain business continuity by keeping AP processing stable through the many IT landscape changes a company can expect to undergo.

Advantages of unified AP workflow

- **Anytime, anywhere access:** With workflow in multiple ERP instances connected externally, buyers and managers to approve, check, comment on, add to, reject or sign off on invoices 24/7, where ever they are. Web-based workflow offers the ability to create a matrix for automation of the approval process, including support for non-Oracle systems and mobile devices.
- **Don’t have to be an Oracle user to approve:** When workflow to numerous ERP/business applications is linked, any approved individual (including non-Oracle users) can approve and manage invoices, providing a single access point for invoice data along with the original document image and a history of actions carried out on it. This allows companies to:
  - Share AP data across business applications
  - Include Purchasing and other departments involved in the workflow
  - Include pre- and post-processing steps in the workflow
  - Extend approval workflow to remote staff and mobile devices
  - View archived invoices and audit trail outside the Oracle E-Business Suite application
- **Simplify training and promote user acceptance:** Users who are unfamiliar with ERP/business applications may not readily embrace the interface. This can cause confusion, errors and, most importantly, user rejection — one of the most common reasons for failure of business process automation projects.
- **Simplify set up of shared services:** Unifying AP workflow in a multi-ERP environment can support efforts to create regional or worldwide shared services centers for AP processing, addressing diverse systems automatically and including logic to avoid errors. And, a cloud service that is monitored 24/7/365 by the service provider can allow enterprises to include locations in different time zones as part of the AP invoice automation. This can dramatically simplify the setup of shared services centers.

*Esker’s solutions are compatible with a wide range of ERP/business applications. However, functionality and usability may differ system to system, depending on the specific environment. Contact Esker to learn more about integration capabilities with your company’s ERP/business application.*
Overcoming the Top Five Challenges

Automation empowers AP departments with the tools needed to achieve their goals quickly and effectively. The aforementioned “top five” challenges faced in manual invoice processing are eliminated when companies choose to automate. Esker research has found AP automation can typically help organizations:

- Receive and enter vendor invoices up to 65% faster through automated sorting and information collection
- Lower P2P process costs by as much as 40-60% with less employee time spent on manual processing
- Improve accuracy up to 99% by reducing manual touch points
- Increase visibility to 100% and heighten security with electronic archiving
- Ease data retrieval by having all invoices available at your fingertips

KPI Improvement

Over time, automation can be a key driver for elevating your KPI standing in comparison to top industry metrics. It’s no coincidence best-in-class AP organizations are exceptional in the very areas automation is known to improve. According to one 2013 study, top performers are identified as organizations with:

- **Faster processing times**: Top performers processed supplier invoices approximately 20% faster than their peers.4
- **Less expensive**: Top performers processed supplier invoices approximately 63% cheaper than their peers.4
- **Better accuracy**: Top performers required approximately 80% less AP invoice processing rework than their peers.4
- **Higher productivity**: Top performers were able to process approximately 87% more invoices in the same amount of time as their peers.4
CUSTOMER RESULTS

Thanks to an “ERP-agnostic” automation platform, Esker’s Order Processing solution is compatible with virtually every ERP system — allowing companies to do away with manual tasks and pain points associated with traditional order management without disrupting existing applications. Below are some of the biggest benefits Esker customers have achieved in a wide array of ERP environments:

Parts Town
- Increased productivity by 60% going from 57 to 92 invoices per-day/per-user
- Gained 30% in additional savings each month by capturing more discounts

Maxim Integrated
- Achieved a 95% on-time invoice payment rate
- Digitally archived 100% of invoices

Armtect
- Accelerated AP invoice processing speeds by 50%
- Quikened average payment proposal generation time from 1-2 days to 1-1.5 hours

Farmland Foods
- Reduced average “out period" for freight invoices from 14 to 2 days
- Decreased outstanding accruals by $8 million

With Esker, we have cut our operating costs, paper costs, printing costs, postage costs and storage costs. It easily exceeded our expectations.
Financial Controller | Craig Mostyn Group

Besides all of the workflow benefits we’ve seen with Esker, one of the biggest advantages has been all of the free time our reps now have to spend on higher-value tasks. Rather than wasting time on data entry, we’re able to focus more on the customer service side and getting our vendors paid in a timely fashion.
AP Supervisor | Armtec

Having full OCR and the ability to post invoices to SAP, and see them with 100% visibility, has had a significant impact on our company’s overall success.
Director of Global MRO Purchasing | Albemarte
HOW AP INVOICE AUTOMATION IS IMPLEMENTED

Two Options to Fit Your Unique Needs

**In the Cloud or On-Premises**

Easily deploy your automation solution any way you choose — on-premises via Esker DeliveryWare or in the cloud via Esker on Demand.

**Esker on Demand: automation as a cloud-based service**

Esker offers the option of leveraging the same secure, efficient and integrated document delivery service you expect from on-premises solution as an on-demand service. Esker on Demand is a pay-as-you-go document process and information exchange service that allows you to move from capital to operational expenditure and gain flexibility for variations in document volume and users.

**Esker DeliveryWare: automation on-premises**

For those that prefer to host their solution on-site, Esker DeliveryWare makes it easy to integrate an automated AP management system with an Oracle E-Business Suite system. Regardless of source, channel or destination, Esker DeliveryWare provides end-to-end automation capabilities for receiving, entering and tracking inbound vendor invoices — eliminating the challenges of manual data entry and routing in the purchase-to-pay cycle.

**The SaaS Advantage: Benefits of AP Invoice Automation in the Cloud**

Esker utilizes the Software as a Service (SaaS) delivery model to facilitate the use of document process automation solutions in the cloud, which offers a series of unique advantages for both the IT department and the business:

- Defined predictable spends via set monthly fees
- Fast deployment and flexibility with no installation
- Rapid adoption and high ROI value
- Free and continuous upgrades

With no equipment to set up, the solution can be up and running quickly with little downtime. After initial sign-up and structuring the solution to fit your internal processes, Esker takes care of the rest, including setting up users and permissions, uploading data, and training your staff.

The service is also highly scalable, allowing the benefits to stretch beyond AP to more of Esker’s on-demand services, such as order processing, purchasing, accounts receivable, Esker Cloud Fax Services and more.
Agile Methodology

When implementing an AP automation solution, Esker always aims to make the process as quick and responsive as possible. That is why Esker takes an Agile approach to implementation — allowing our customers, business partners and their key stakeholders are able to achieve maximum value throughout every phase of solution delivery.

Agile methodology offers a hands-on approach to managing your automation project. Beginning with presales planning, Esker works with customers to create a vision for their project and define goals. After creating an initial release plan in collaboration with the customer, Esker quickly turns the customer’s desired list of features into results.

Users provide feedback and respond to change after go-live, allowing their solution to adapt to their specific business needs. This rapid delivery and customer focus lets the customer achieve the highest business value in the shortest amount of time.

How it benefits customers

Faster delivery means faster results: The sooner a solution can go live, the sooner a business can reap the benefits. Agile methodology allows for a high level of customer involvement and customization, which typically leads to a number of benefits that include:

- Gaining the benefits of the solution more rapidly with faster Return on Investment (ROI)
- Investing resources in the most valuable features
- Reducing risks and lowering overall startup costs
- Ability to make decisions and modifications with context and experience
- Quickly receiving new features to test
- Being directly involved in the project; greater process insight

How it benefits Esker’s internal development

User feedback is key in improving Esker’s internal development. Applying the same principles of the agile approach used for customer automation projects, Esker is able to focus more on research and development. By incorporating customer feedback, Esker can constantly enhance the performance of their solutions and improve their products in a timely manner. What’s more, the Agile methodology is not only responsive to customer needs on an individual level, the adaptations improve the service as a whole.
Change Management

Arguably, the single most important element in determining the success of your AP automation project is how change is handled on an individual, team and organizational level. Most business project initiatives fail because the case for change was not adequately made to the key decision-makers and those who would be affected by the change.

Change management is a structured approach for delivering the right information to the right people at the right time — increasing the odds that change is implemented smoothly and transparently, and that the proper resources are allocated throughout each step of the process.

Numbers tell the story

To put things in perspective, the figure on the right is from a 2014 change management report5 by Prosci that illustrates a correlation between change management effectiveness and meeting or exceeding project objectives. Of the participants that had “excellent” change management programs in place, 96% met or exceeded objectives. That’s six times higher compared to the 16% success rate for those with “poor” programs in place. Furthermore, even participants with “fair” change management programs were nearly three times more likely to meet or exceed objectives.

Esker’s active approach to change management

Esker’s approach to change management comes down to a simple truth: Organizations change for a reason, and the “people side” of that change needs to be properly managed in order to realize the desired outcomes.

The Esker Solution Methodology (ESM) encourages a user-friendly and collaborative environment so that the chosen solution is highly responsive to the individuals actually using it. Our highly trained and certified experts work closely with you to align all expectations and strategies by following a Prosci-inspired three-phase change management process:

### Phase 1: Change preparation
- Defining your strategy
- Preparing your change management team
- Developing your sponsorship model

### Phase 2: Change management
- Developing change management plans
- Implementing your actionable plans

### Phase 3: Change reinforcement
- Collecting and analyzing feedback
- Diagnosing gaps and managing resistance
- Implementing corrective actions
- Celebrating change management successes

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CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF ACCOUNTS PAYABLE AUTOMATION

As AP departments continue to endure the pains of manual invoice processing and automation technologies continue to emerge, it is inevitable that an increasing number of organizations will move towards more modernized forms of business technology. The numerous benefits AP automation has the potential to offer — particularly end-to-end solutions — are rapidly becoming too great to ignore.

The future holds a host of developments for automation itself, especially in the ongoing advancements in cloud technology. The SaaS approach to automation expects to become increasingly popular, appealing to businesses as a low-risk, inexpensive way to automate. Due to its scalable nature and dynamic features, cloud-based technology brings document process automation within reach of any organization.

As with any new technology, there will always be skeptics (i.e., those that think they cannot adapt to new technology). Automation is no exception: When considering unique workflows and organizational complexity, upgrading to an automation solution can be an intimidating idea. However, with an experienced vendor and the right solution, change can be introduced and managed at the right pace and optimal level for your organization’s specific AP needs.
ABOUT ESKER

Esker is a worldwide leader in cloud-based document process automation software. Organizations of all sizes use our shared platform of solutions, offered on-demand or on-premises, to automate accounts payable, order processing, accounts receivable, purchasing and more. Esker’s solutions are compatible with all geographic, regulatory and technology business environments.

Global Expertise

Founded in 1985, Esker’s solutions are used by over 11,000 customers globally, from small to mid-sized businesses to large corporate entities. Esker operates in North America, Latin America, Europe and Asia Pacific with global headquarters in Lyon, France, and U.S. headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin.

Data Security & Integrity

Esker has earned SSAE 16 Type 1 and Type 2 compliance for its on-demand automation solutions (following an audit conducted by A-lign™ Security and Compliance Services). This means Esker’s processes, procedures and controls have been formally reviewed and are documented in accordance with the rules of internal control outlined in the Sarbanes-Oxley Act legislation.