



Driving AP Success with Automation

A three-step guide to fixing the AP problems
that are slowing down your team



Introduction

Adaptability is key to thriving in a world where [entire markets change](#) seemingly overnight. As every function is required to accomplish more with fewer resources, smart organizations are [implementing new finance tools](#) to unlock a technology-based advantage.

Accounts payable teams are central to an organization's success. Yet many teams rarely have the tools to live up to their potential due to manual inefficiencies. Even the most streamlined invoice lifecycle requires input from multiple people both in and outside the organization.

A [recent study](#) by consulting firm Accenture found that just 14% of companies are considered "digitally mature". Meaning they implemented the culture, training, tools, and processes to empower their employees to thrive in a changing landscape.

As efficiency takes center stage, business leaders are seizing the opportunity to digitize finance. Our studies with ICAS and Finance Director revealed that 94% of [CFOs believe digital transformation is critical](#) to the organization's future success.

In this ebook, we cover how to:

- Identify your biggest accounts payable bottlenecks
- Implement seamless solutions
- Capitalize on automation

For organizations to get total value from their investments—in tech or people—requires a holistic approach to unite processes and tools, regardless of where employees work.



Identify your AP challenges

It's important to first identify the practices and processes that are holding back your team's potential. Take a moment to go through this chapter and ask yourself which of these challenges apply to your company.

TIME-CONSUMING MANUAL TASKS

Many teams spend a disproportionate amount of time on manual AP management.

COMPLEX ROUTING AND APPROVALS

The average AP process for companies from beginning to end can include five or more general steps. There are also several touchpoints that require approvals from managers or finance teams.

For example, one team member may need to:

1. Provide an initial requisition form
2. Create a product fulfillment order
3. Conduct invoice matching
4. Submit processing and payment

Or, if the team requires more layers of protocol, they may need to:

1. Receive vendor invoices
2. Perform a 3-way match for consistency
3. Consult on any variance with buyer
4. Correct any variations
5. Verify receipt of goods or service
6. Receive AP department approval for invoice payment
7. Submit to AP department to issue checks and payments
8. Mark invoices as paid

Sound familiar? With so many different steps to progress forward, standard processes can easily lead to delayed approvals, lost or forgotten invoices, and even late payments.

Added up, all of these small tasks can take hours—or even weeks—to successfully bring to the finish line.

Does your team struggle with any of the challenges below? Check all that apply.

Manually adding data and invoices to spreadsheets

Manually integrating data with existing ERP

Creating and approving requisitions

Hand-delivering invoices to desks

Matching invoices by line items

Matching and processing payments

Writing out and sending paper checks

Responding to long email threads for noncompliant submissions



86% of Emburse Certify customer accountants said moving to an online solution helped them increase productivity by automating mundane, manual tasks

Source: TechValidate survey of Emburse Certify customers



PROCESSES THAT AREN'T REMOTE FRIENDLY

An increasing number of employers are offering full-time or part-time remote work. Manual AP processes prevent teams from working in a dynamic and remote-friendly way. That doesn't only count for people who want to work from home, either—manual inputs also make it harder for traveling employees to keep up with timely submissions and approvals.

LOST TIME THROUGH APPROVAL AND PROCESSING CYCLES

According to a study by Ardent Partners, it takes nearly 11 days just to process a single invoice. That doesn't even include all of the steps mentioned above.

A prolonged process makes it difficult for your company to pay in a timely manner and retain positive relationships.

By 2025, 36.2 million Americans will be working remotely

Source: 2020 Upwork Future Workforce Pulse Report

For example, if your invoicing and AP processing cycle runs on a delay, that also makes it difficult to:

- Keep an accurate inventory
- Expedite processing cycles via “straight-through” invoices
- Electronically submit invoices
- Link invoices to purchase orders
- Pay vendors on time
- Maintain positive relationships with suppliers
- Deliver strategic insights

Manual data entry slows down this process and also reduces the visibility your team needs to prevent time-consuming mistakes.



DATA ACCURACY AND COMPLIANCE RISKS

Manual AP processing is more prone to human error because there are so many different touchpoints throughout the process.

For example, if an approved requisition doesn't match a purchase order, or a submitted invoice isn't associated with the correct department and project, team members will often have to manually comb through data to find discrepancies and fix errors.

This quickly results in lost time, and even makes it easier for fraudulent activities to slip under the radar.

LACK OF VISIBILITY

When an employee submits a requisition request, are you able to see clearly how that process is linked end-to-end?

Oftentimes, lack of visibility makes it easier for requisitions or invoices to fall through the cracks while also preventing companies from taking advantage of early payment discounts. Not tracking data on the AP process also prevents you from seeing higher-level trends. For example, you may not be able to anticipate seasonally popular requests for certain supplies, or see the inflated costs of working with a specific vendor.

HIGH RISK OF FRAUD

Total fraud losses reported in a PwC survey totaled \$42 billion—which goes to show that customer fraud, cybercrime, and asset misappropriation are alive and thriving. Without greater insight and automated compliance controls built into your company's AP cycle, fraudulent charges and suspicious invoices may pass through the system unnoticed.

Those checks and balances could mean the difference between losing thousands of dollars, or keeping it safely in your company's coffers.

47% of companies experienced fraud in the past 24 months

Source: PwC's Global Economic Crime and Fraud Survey 2020

ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS

Human labor costs can quickly translate into compounding administrative costs.

Organizations that use a manual AP process pay up to \$10 per AP invoice processed. The most efficient organizations only pay about \$2 per invoice.

These factors compound resulting in higher operational costs for your finance team.

In the next section, we'll explore innovative solutions your team can leverage to make these problems a thing of the past.

Does your business face challenges with any of the following?

Overpayment

Late payments

Costs of mailing and printing

Audit costs



Implement seamless AP solutions

Making the switch to an automated AP solution can have night and day results for companies that continue to struggle with the pains of manual input. Here are just a few ways your company can take the reins and forge a new path forward.

STEP ONE:

Create More Efficient Processes

MOVE YOUR AP FUNCTION ONLINE

It's time to ditch the pieces of paper, handwritten checks, and fax machines. Companies that move their AP functions online and automate the AP cycle drastically reduce processing costs and time spent.

Look for software solutions that offer features such as:

- Online requisition and invoice processing capabilities
- Advanced analytics dashboards to gain insight into AP
- A shorter process that significantly reduces your AP cycle

Making this move has unforeseen benefits, as well. **A study conducted** by Emburse Certify found that 98% of customers agreed that automating previously manual tasks allowed them to support a remote workforce.

Automated systems also offer more online-friendly features. This allows remote workers to bypass certain aspects of

physical paperwork and complete related work online. That means not only can your team benefit from a more seamless system, but those benefits also allow your company to attract and retain talent, regardless of physical location.

BUILD AUTOMATED WORKFLOWS AND APPROVALS

Online AP solutions make it easy to build automated workflows and approvals. This drastically reduces the AP cycle, which in turn makes it easier to pay vendors on time and avoid late fees.

36% of surveyed professionals said they were concerned with late payments due to process delays

Source: ap-association.com/facts-statistics/



With the right program, easily create custom workflows that fit your team's specific compliance requirements. Your team can also create automated approvals for invoices that are pre-approved.

A more efficient and accurate approval process helps maintain important relationships with suppliers and vendors.

FACILITATE A SECURE AND EASY SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

Most employees make work-related purchases based on their discretion at different stores, for different prices. Some online AP solutions offer a tailored shopping experience that helps your company save money over the long term.

Companies can take advantage of features such as:

- Shopping with pre-approved vendors
- Negotiating pre-approved discounts
- Tracking order status
- Paying vendors quickly
- Earning early payment discounts

This experience eliminates the potential of employees overspending and makes the process easier for everyone.

Process electronic, direct-to-bank payments
Paying vendor invoices through snail mail and paper checks slows down the AP process at nearly every step. Find a solution that allows you to process electronic payments directly to banks. This will speed up the process and save you money on postage and paper. Some solutions also offer global payment options, so you can pay your vendors easily—no matter what type of currency they use.

INTEGRATE WITH OTHER COST MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

Is your company already using accounting software or other cost management solutions? Or are you one of the many organizations using spreadsheets and your Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) to manage AP processes?

Regardless of what you already have in place, this could be the perfect opportunity to up your game and include AP in the process.

Choosing an AP vendor with a holistic suite of solutions offers numerous features, such as:

- Travel and expense management
- Streamlined reimbursements
- Global B2B payments
- Detection and auditing
- Analytics and insights

Whichever automation software you decide on, make sure that it complements with your current software—or just acts as a total package upgrade.

CENTRALIZE INVOICE COLLECTIONS IN ONE PLACE

Finance teams who work with manual systems often receive invoices on loose pieces of paper, or even have invoices sent late or to the wrong place. This creates a cascade of problems for your team, suppliers, and vendors.

A new online solution will digitize your invoices and store them in a central place that's easy to access. That means no more rummaging around for loose pieces of paper—everything is searchable and smoothly moves along the AP cycle. Online invoices also ensure multiple people can have access to the same file.



STEP TWO:

Save Time and Money

SAVE TIME WITH AN EASIER PROCESS

Manual data entry, process delays, and paper invoices slow down the AP cycle every step of the way. Once you've automated the most painful aspects of the process, you'll begin to see a variety of positive benefits.

Organizations that move towards automation often save hours of work every month, reduce errors, and reimburse invoices faster.

Those drastic changes simply wouldn't be possible with manual spreadsheets or a clunky platform. With that time saved, your team can focus more on projects and initiatives that matter.

SAVE MONEY ON COSTS AND FEES

After moving your AP process online, your team won't face the same urgent concerns about inefficiencies, late fees, and strained business relationships.

A more efficient AP cycle will have a positive snowball effect that generously allows you to save money on unexpected costs or late invoice fees.

In fact, [a study of Certify customers](#) found that 78% of those surveyed saw a return on their investment in under six months after switching to an online solution.

That increased efficiency is where you'll find savings on both costs and fees, time and again.



78% of Emburse Certify customers who increased productivity by automating manual tasks saw a return on their investment in under six months

Source: TechValidate survey of Emburse Certify customers

97% of surveyed Non-profit customers said that they are satisfied with Emburse Nexonia's ability to provide better oversight into costs and expenses

Source: TechValidate study of Emburse Nexonia customers



STEP THREE:

Use New Tools for Compliance and Insights

CREATE A MORE COMPLIANT PROCESS

Your AP solution should allow you to build in automated approval rules, so the software automatically rejects suspicious activity.

The new AP tools at your disposal will allow you to:

- Prevent paying duplicate invoices
- Automatically send back bills without the necessary information
- Automatically reject requests for supplies that aren't covered by your company's policy

AP software can automatically match, cross-check, and fill orders—and make it harder for mistakes to pass by unnoticed.

This built-in system will also make it easier for your employees to stay compliant and remember what fields or information is required to send a proper request.

With a more compliant process, your team will have more time to focus on bigger picture initiatives at hand instead of combing through invoices and enforcing policy.

LEVERAGE DATA VISIBILITY

Your AP solution should have a data analytics dashboard already baked into the product. This feature allows you to see larger AP trends, without the need to compile and analyze the data yourself.

Looking at the data on your AP cycle and spend, your team can ask bigger questions such as:

- Are you more likely to receive invoices at the end of the month?
- Does one department tend to overspend compared to another?
- Are you missing out on early payment discounts?
- Are you spending way more on certain vendors for the same goods and services you receive from another?

Analyzing data-based trends will allow you to better forecast AP cash flow and predict where your resources should go.

88% of finance professionals said data and intelligence are important or critical pieces of the AP process

Source: Ardent Partners, Accounts Payable Metrics That Matter 2020.



Customer spotlight



ALKU is a consulting services firm that focuses on ERP, healthcare IT, life sciences, government programs, and information security.

With seven offices nationwide, ALKU needed to keep pace with the growing number of invoices. Their AP process was outdated and relied heavily on time-consuming, manual data entry.

This often resulted in missing information, lost invoices, and approvals for payment delays. After implementing Emburse Certify, ALKU was able to transform and optimize their financial operations.

COMPANY OVERVIEW

- **Headquarters:** Andover, MA
- **Company size:** 280+
- **Industry:** Professional services



With our previous process, AP was constantly chasing missing invoices, which was extremely time consuming. Not only was it an inefficient use of time, but it caused payment delays and was simply not scalable as we grew. With Certify AP, we can rely on the system to do all the heavy lifting for us, automatically.

Dan Sangeorge
Cost Accounting Manager

| CHALLENGES | RESULTS | ADDITIONAL BENEFITS |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual AP process that struggled to keep pace with high volume of invoices • Inefficient, paper-based flow that resulted in lost invoices and payment delays • Lack of reporting capabilities with no visibility into invoice status | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4000 invoices processed automatically, without manual intervention • 100% visibility into invoice status and spend data • 87% decrease in volume of physical checks cut | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves AP efficiency • Automates purchase orders • Increases visibility • Enables remote work • Promotes innovation |



Customer spotlight



The University of Pennsylvania Health System (UPHS) is a world-renowned academic medical center and consistently advances medical science through research with a multitude of providers in the greater Philadelphia area.

With so many locations throughout Pennsylvania, UPHS needed to streamline an outdated AP process with a remote-friendly solution that automates control, enforces compliance, and tracks spending.

Emburse Chrome River streamlined UPHS’s processing of non-PO invoices—cutting the time spent on this task by more than half. The intuitive solution empowers end users and corporate staff alike by removing non-value-add steps to free the Shared Services team to better support its clients.

COMPANY OVERVIEW

- **Headquarters:** Philadelphia, PA
- **Company size:** 30,000+
- **Industry:** Healthcare



With our team members constantly on the go, having a mobile invoice management solution was a top priority. Chrome River met all of our initial wants and needs. We received all the benefits without changing our processes, our business rules or user roles. We saw a reduction of over 50% in the time AP spent on processing non-PO invoices.

Steve Kelley
Director of Disbursements

| CHALLENGES | RESULTS | ADDITIONAL BENEFITS |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual AP process that struggled to keep pace with high volume of invoices • Inefficient workflows resulted in lost invoices and payment delays • Lack of analytics with no visibility into invoice status • Over 8,000 invoices and reports processed monthly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automation transformed previously manual processes to free up time for higher-level initiatives • 50% reduction in time processing non-PO invoices • Mobile-friendly solutions enable employees to work from anywhere | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form entry compliance • Built-in role-based approvals • Email access to supporting documentation • Increased visibility • Enables remote work • Insights into invoice status |



Customer spotlight



Since 1889, Educational Alliance has brought together diverse communities in Manhattan by offering high-quality, multi-generational services.

With 15 sites sprawled across Manhattan, Educational Alliance managed over 1,000 expenses and invoices per month. The non-profit’s paper-based processes were out of hand, and deeply impacted growth as well as their ability to serve more New Yorkers.

With expense and AP solutions from Emburse Nexonia, the non-profit is now able to make better use of their staff’s time so they can grow sustainably and continue enriching the lives of the people who matter most.

COMPANY OVERVIEW

- **Headquarters:** New York, NY
- **Company size:** 1,000+
- **Industry:** Nonprofit



I cannot remember how we functioned without this. I’m not joking. The process is so much easier. Just being transparent, tracking any order at any time, and having an archive of it has been so impactful. Now we catch 90% of errors upfront.

Anthony Herrera,
Senior Manager of Business Systems

| CHALLENGES | RESULTS | ADDITIONAL BENEFITS |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual AP process struggled to scale as organization expanded • Complex, multi-location organization • Disconnected accounting systems • “Blame Games” between departments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% of errors caught prior to processing • Improved cashflow and forecasting by program or location • 66% faster month-end close • Air-tight audit trail | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unified expense and accounts payable solutions • Granular allocation control • Configurable, automated approval workflows • Bi-directional integration with Intacct |





Emburse can help

Emburse offers a suite of award-winning expense and AP automation solutions. Emburse humanizes work by empowering business travelers, finance professionals, and CFOs to eliminate manual, time-consuming tasks so they can focus on what matters most.

You can learn more by visiting emburse.com.



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