

## Work management trends in AP automation



**E**nterprise content management solutions for accounts payable aren't new, but changes in the ways people work have inspired a new generation of content automation applications that deliver greater agility and usability. Today's knowledge workers are more mobile, work outside traditional business hours, and are less likely to be full-time or long-term employees. Yet they are more connected via technology and cross-functional teams.

To achieve AP benchmarks in this new paradigm, AP leaders need solutions that are easy to use, accessible, tightly integrated with enterprise resource planning (ERP) and other systems, and flexible enough to allow for quick response to business changes. Innovative technology vendors are delivering better options for enterprise work management in financial operations.

### Workflow

Automated workflow certainly isn't new for purchase-to-pay processes such as vendor invoices. What is changing is the focus on the user — from the AP clerk to the chief financial officer to the system administrator who configures the software — rather than the process. Because workers tend to switch jobs more often and management demands results sooner, AP solutions must be able to manage complex processes while simplifying the user experience.

Workflow tools that reflect the way users work require minimal training for users and IT administrators, allowing new employees to be productive more quickly. With graphical tools, IT can respond to business needs quickly when requirements or enhancements are needed. This increased productivity also helps AP achieve return on investment sooner and lower total cost of ownership.

### Cloud

No longer just an affordable alternative for small and midsize businesses, cloud has become a standard for enterprises, too. Cloud provides the quick implementation and scalability needed to respond to demands of the business at a price that is predictable and consistent. AP has more control of the solution and avoids resource provisioning delays.



Cloud also delivers the security and accessibility needed to support and manage today's distributed workforce. This gives AP management more options for engaging remote employees, establishing teams in regions where labor is less expensive, or attracting new talent by supporting telecommuting. Cloud's accessibility makes it possible to maintain operations during unexpected circumstances, such as weather emergencies, in which employees can't get to the office.

Cloud-native functionality is one area that will differentiate automation vendors. When legacy on-premises solutions are moved to a data center, they don't offer the same Web optimization as a solution designed for usability in the cloud.

### Mobile

Seamless mobility has become a must-have for AP processing. Busy employees working at odd hours from unpredictable locations must be able to easily complete tasks such as approving and reviewing documents using whatever device they have at hand. AP will see the benefit in more on-time approvals and fewer service requests.

Because easy-to-use mobile apps are ubiquitous, users will no longer tolerate the frustration of a poor mobile experience. Products that use responsive design technology automatically adapt the software to the device, eliminating this frustration. Mobility has become a standard requirement, so it should be part of the overall solution, not an extra charge or additional license.

### Analytics

Process-oriented technology is making way for applications that support the entire work process, including readily available business intelligence. Purchase-to-pay professionals not only need single-click access to information such as outstanding liabilities and user productivity, but they also need the data for trending and predictive analysis.

Innovative technologies that improve the flow of work make it easier for AP departments to justify the cost of workflow automation, especially in the mid-market. Companies with legacy solutions need to be aware of the impact that convergence of cloud, mobile, and other advanced technology could have on their operations.

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