

Accounts Payable Automation: A Buyer's Guide

Choosing the Right Solution for Your Business



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Smart, Connected Invoice Automation: Why Now?

These days, business moves at one speed – fast. Businesses are keeping up and preparing for future growth in changing market conditions by modernizing, finding more efficient ways to work, and automating wherever they can. Every small step is an opportunity to identify moments where savings and reduced business risk can be achieved. Financial processes like expense management and payroll are common areas where businesses can simplify and optimize. Yet invoice management tends to be overlooked – even though the potential for payoff can be significant.

Automating vendor invoice management supports business growth and allows the flexibility to handle whatever comes your way. For example, broken supply chains and hybrid work introduced an influx of new vendors and payment types.

Managing increased transaction volumes without hiring more staff would be easier if software could take care of the manual work. Automating invoice management processes can reduce the risk of errors, duplicates, and lost documentation, improving your team's efficiency.

Beyond the performance advantages for day-to-day invoice management, integrating vendor and payment data with your ERP or financial system allows invoice matching from POs to goods or services received. You'll get a better view of your overall financial position so you can forecast, budget, and plan with confidence. It's possible with a connected, integrated invoice management solution.

Common Business Operations and Digital Transformation Goals

53%

of businesses want to free employees from mundane tasks to focus on strategic work.¹

48%

want to digitally transform their overall finance process.²

49%

hope to leverage technology to support business continuity to address business climate changes.³

The Upside to Automated Expense Management

Manual accounts payable processes make it difficult to monitor spending trends and detect potential mistakes or fraud. Inaccurate entries and incomplete documentation ultimately lead to cash flow problems and regulatory failures. Time-consuming payment processes result in missing out on payment rebates or incurring and late fees, which reduce working capital.

Automated invoice management makes it easier to monitor spending trends and detect potential mistakes. Solutions using AI and machine learning pick up on the smallest trends and patterns of risk and turning them into opportunities. Each one is a chance to improve your performance, impact your bottom line, and reinvest in your company.

Late payments can become a significant cost that is easy to rectify. Automated AP makes it easier to capture payment discounts and avoid late fees. With

more money in the bank, you've got more to reinvest in the business.

Remove people from the manual tasks, and you remove the risk of delays and compliance failure caused by incorrect entries and misplaced documentation. Your finance team will thank you for freeing them from tedious tasks that keep them from doing more important work.

What's Holding Companies Back?

Usually, nothing – once they realize how much manual processes actually cost. From lost time and productivity, lost moments of opportunity, and talent lost to poor employee experiences – the actual costs are significant. Other companies may believe they are already 'automated enough'. However, simply logging invoices into your ERP/financial system or emailing approvals doesn't count when the rest of the steps are manual.

Top pain points for finance leaders prior to automating⁴



Incomplete
documentation



Time taken away from
strategic work

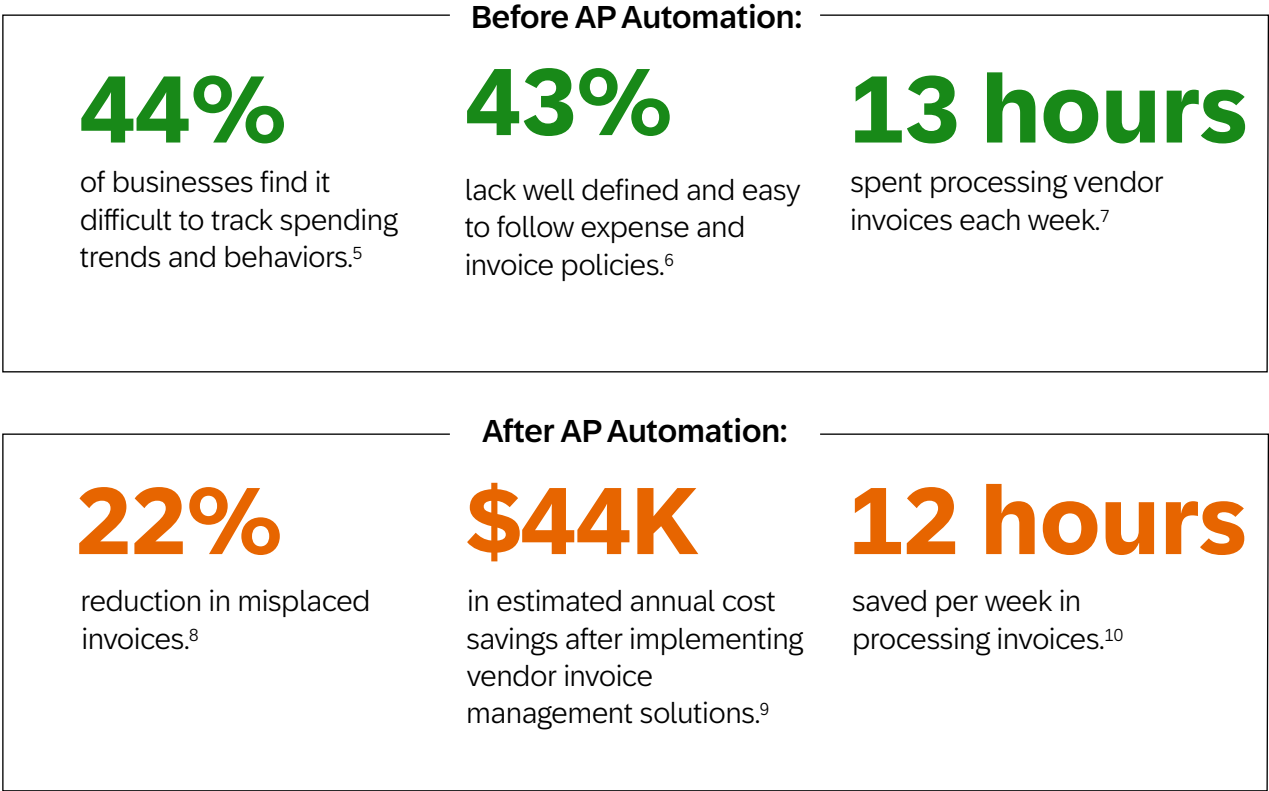


Difficulty tracking spending
trends and behaviors

What Does Truly Automated AP Look Like?

When your invoice processing is fully automated, people are free to focus on taking advantage of the moments that make the business run better.

- Invoices received are immediately scanned by machine learning-assisted optical character recognition (OCR) technology.
- Everything from approvals to matching invoices to goods or services received can be automated.
- AP data can be fully integrated with the ecosystem of apps and partners to create a single source for financial data.
- With fewer manual touches, there are fewer manual errors.
- Reports are readily available and show an accurate picture of cash flow.



“We went with Concur Invoice because it allows us to **move all of our expense items electronically** through an invoice process without having to have paper moving around. It also helped us remove all of the file cabinets and storage we had in our office space as well as not having staff constantly be pulling files and refiling things away.”¹¹

Mark Hummer, Administrative Manager of Finance, The Conference Board of New York

Steps to Successful Automation

When you're ready to explore expense management solutions, take advice from experts and follow best practices. Whether you are planning to start by automating employee spending or are looking to complement other financial management capabilities, there are several steps to consider.

1

Step 1 - Get the right people involved

The decision to automate AP is rarely made by one person. Get ideas and perspectives from everyone who will be impacted. That includes the CFO, IT, Procurement, and anyone else with an interest in the financial health of the company. Your first stop should be with your AP team, who are likely to have a wealth of insights and ideas on improving the processes they use every day.

2

Step 2 - Where are you? Where do you want to go?

Start with ensuring you have a detailed understanding of your existing AP workflows such as how you “receive”, “process” and “pay” invoices, processing volumes, and response times. Map your current processes to the new ones you would like to develop. Ask yourself what challenges are associated with each of your existing processes. The new automated process should easily address them to deliver more value. Working with an experienced solution provider or consultant can help you set expectations and focus on realistic goals.

3

Step 3 – Identify challenges

Change rarely comes without challenges. Be prepared to meet them head-on by anticipating what could go wrong and finding ways to right the ship. Working with a solution provider or consultant with experience can help you feel more confident in preventing disruption as new workflows are implemented, onboarding new users, growing adoption, and managing change.

4

Step 4 – Get up to speed on requirements

Gathering the right technology and business requirements is essential to a successful initiative, as it ensures that the most appropriate solution is ultimately selected. Choose an invoice management solution that complements your existing technology. You should be able to get up and running quickly and work with your IT team to integrate it with other financial systems and your ERP. The solution should be flexible enough to expand with you as you continue to automate and as the business grows.

5

Step 5 – Manage the change

Automating invoice management can lead to greater productivity, insights, employee satisfaction, and overall growth. You don't want disruption in your processes to put you off course. Setting up people for success with adequate training and support will help ensure that your automation project gets off to a running start.

6

Step 6 - Feedback and repeat

One of the benefits of a connected, integrated solution is seeing results quickly. Use that data, along with feedback from your stakeholders, to continuously build and improve your processes over time.



“The benefits we get, the staff satisfaction, the efficiency, we have supplier satisfaction because they get paid a lot quicker, these are all important things for having a good working environment going forward. **I wouldn't hesitate to automate.”¹²**

[Joe Hall, chief financial officer, Honda NZ](#)

Choosing the Right Solution

There are many AP automation solutions available in the marketplace. Your challenge is finding the one that fits best now and is ready to expand when you are. At a minimum, look for a solution that allows you to get with minimal lift for your team and technical resources, adapts when needed, and provides the insights necessary to make real-time strategic decisions with more confidence.



- Connect the dots across all employee spending for better visibility and more control over budgets, cash flow, and regulatory compliance.
- Reduce costs to boost your bottom line and maximize profitability by improving budget controls and forecasting.
- Empower people to make proactive and informed decisions based on near real-time spend insights.
- Gain operational efficiency, reduce errors, and improve employee satisfaction and retention by reducing manual tasks and increasing the focus on strategic work.



Automated Invoice Capture

In a truly automated solution, all invoices enter the system electronically using optical character recognition (OCR). Look for a solution that pairs OCR with AI and machine learning capabilities and human auditors to bring accuracy rates closer to 100%. This ensures all data is accurate for approvals and before payment goes out the door.



Scalability

You want your invoice management solution to scale with your business. Therefore, your solution should automate the entire AP process, from invoice submission to routing to approvals – and provide full visibility and control at every step in the process. Automation should also extend to matching invoices to goods received.



Workflow Optimization and Customization

Your new invoice management solution should standardize and automate the workflow, making it more streamlined, efficient, and intelligent, so it can scale with your business. At the same time, it should have the flexibility for your AP team to outsource parts of the workflow and customize routing rules, policies, and workflows should circumstances change.



Mobile Apps

Make sure your solution offers a mobile app to give people access to your AP automation solution wherever they are. An intuitive interface allows remote workers, field staff, and frequent travellers to stay connected and engaged in the AP process, with the ability to approve or reject invoices on the go. This helps improve invoice processing times and overall efficiency.



Reporting Capabilities

Look for solutions that include standard, predefined reports and built-in tools for monitoring key metrics. Ready-to-use, instant reporting capabilities deliver a near real-time, accurate view of payables to continuously improve AP performance and make more informed decisions around payments to optimize cash flow.

“Concur allowed us to streamline the whole progress and process of an invoice through payment. Adding Concur Invoice has **decreased the amount of time that I’ve spent chasing down paper invoices by 50%.**”¹³

[Karen Grobert, Staff Accountant, Recordati Rare Diseases](#)



Flexible Options

The past few years highlighted the need to be able to handle a variety of new payment types and vendors from outside the approved system. Your automated AP solution should be adaptable to add new payment types and vendors without a lot of extra work or added risk of errors and exceptions.



Extended Capabilities

Make sure the solution meets your business needs today and can grow with you in the future. It must be ready to integrate with the systems you already have in place, such as your ERP, CRM, and financial and accounting solutions – as well as those you may use in the future. Work with your internal IT resources or a solution consultant to determine your needs.



Ease of Use

Your AP solution has to be accessible from anywhere so your people can use it in the office, in their home office, or anywhere on the go. The best solution has an intuitive workflow that guides employees through exactly what they need to do and even does some of the work for them for the best employee experience possible.

“SAP Concur makes it easier for finance because expense, travel and invoice all sit within one platform. Plus, there’s exactly the **same approval process for managers across everything.**” ¹⁴

[Luke Braham, Former Head of Technology Operations, RED](#)

Top 10 Questions to Ask Solution Providers

1. Do you supplement optical character recognition (OCR) with human validation and AI/machine learning technology?
2. Do you have a partner ecosystem that offers me flexibility in payment options?
3. What preconfigured reporting and dashboards are available to see invoice and vendor status?
4. How long will it take to implement the solution and get users fully onboarded?
5. If I'm confused and have a question about the solution, how do I get help?
6. What other systems do you integrate with?
7. Do you have a mobile app, and what can users do with it?
8. Will I have control of and access to my invoices at all times?
9. How will I get my AP data into my ERP or financial system?
10. How is my invoice data protected and secured?



Empower Your Business with Invoice Automation

Every moment of change in today's business environment is an opportunity to do things better. Each aspect of your financial processes has the potential to give insight into decisions and provide certainty to your actions. With SAP® Concur® solutions, you'll move beyond yesterday's tedious tasks to keep your business running at its best every day. Whether you are new to travel, expense, and invoice management, or extending your existing SAP Concur solution to include AP automation, an SAP Concur representative can show you what's possible. Learn more on the [SAP Concur Community](#) or at [concur.co.in](#).

To get started, explore the following:

Self-guided demo for Concur® Invoice to get a sense of how our AP automation solution works

[Learn more](#)

ROI calculator for Concur Invoice to find out how much your company can save with our solution.

[Discover now](#)



Learn more

SAP Concur is the world's leading brand for travel, expense, and invoice management solutions. [Learn more.](#)

Sources:

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