



Florida School District Streamlines Invoice Processing with Document Capture Solution

Palm Beach County School Board makes the grade
with Informa Document Processing Solution

The School District of Palm Beach County is the 11th largest in the U.S. and the 5th largest in the state of Florida with 185 schools, serving more than 183,000 students. As the largest employer in Palm Beach County, the school district has more than 21,000 employees, including more than 12,000 teachers.

Background

As one of the top-performing school districts in Florida, Palm Beach County is committed to providing a world-class education to its students. But with recent economic challenges, the school district has faced significant budget reductions. In order to direct as much of its limited financial resources to student education as possible, the school board is focused on maximizing efficiencies and savings. Heather Knust, Director of Accounting Services at Palm Beach County School Board, oversees the financial operations of the school district. With partner Informa Software, Knust recently deployed Informa's ImageQuest ECM along with OpenText Capture Center to optimize the school board's accounts payable processes.

Challenge

Costly Manual and Paper-Intensive Processes

The school board's accounts payable (AP) department processes an estimated 175,000 invoices annually for all the schools and departments within the Palm Beach County school district. But the processing of invoices was very manual and labor-intensive. In order to reduce costs and improve productivity, Knust wanted to automate these repetitive, manual, and paper-based processes, but she needed a solution that would integrate with the Oracle® PeopleSoft system that the AP department was using.

Cumbersome Record-Keeping Requirements

In addition, as a government entity, Palm Beach County School Board has to follow certain mandates when it comes to maintaining records, resulting in high costs for storage of paper invoices and additional manual processes. Knust wanted to eliminate

INDUSTRY

- *Education*

CUSTOMER

- *Palm Beach County School Board*

PARTNER

- *OpenText*

CHALLENGES

- *Labor-intensive, paper-based invoice processing*
- *Costly paper and cumbersome records retention processes*
- *Lack of visibility into invoice process*

SOLUTION

- *Informa Image Quest and OpenText Capture Center*

BENEFITS

- *Faster invoice processing and reduced paper storage costs*
- *Automated processes reduce headcount requirements*
- *Increased visibility and accountability for invoice process*
- *Electronic storage and simple retrieval of invoice documentation.*



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– KEN KOHLER, PEOPLESOFT FUNCTIONAL SPECIALIST, PALM BEACH COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

those storage costs and automate those processes. “We have to pay for offsite storage for all of our invoices, except the current and the previous fiscal year. When invoices are requested for audits or public records requests, we have to order some of the boxes from storage, which takes two-to-five days to arrive. We then have to find the invoice, remove the staples, photocopy it, and then file it. It is an extremely manual process and invoices can easily be misplaced,” she explains.

Solution

A Trusted Partnership

In searching for a solution that would help automate invoice processing, Knust considered the partnership the school district already had with Informa Software, a Florida-based company specializing in process automation, document management, email management, and document distribution software solutions. Palm Beach County District School Board had previously worked with Informa to automate time, expense, and travel reimbursement forms.

Advanced Document Capture Solution

In collaboration with Informa, the school board determined that a solution composed of ImageQuest and Capture Center was the solution of choice. Capture Center uses advanced tools to capture, classify, extract information from, validate, and store paper documents and other types of content in ImageQuest.

The solution applies document recognition functionality first to classify the document type and then extract business data from the digital image using Optical Character Recognition (OCR), Intelligent Character Recognition (ICR), and Intelligent Document Recognition (IDR). Knust shares her rationale: “We knew that Informa would be a good partner and that they would be able to work with the OpenText Capture Center solution. If we were to go with another solution, it would have been plain, out-of-the-box, and I wouldn’t have had all the additional functionality that I was looking for.”

Implementation

In August 2014, the school board deployed the Capture Center solution, starting with the scanning of invoices, which allows Palm Beach County School Board to automatically capture and interpret paper invoices, scanned images, email, and faxes. The solution features a customized workflow, created by Informa in the ImageQuest solution, to route

invoices through OpenText Capture Center to the PeopleSoft ERP system, while automatically storing the images in ImageQuest for easy retrieval. “That was part of the value-add service that we provided. We crafted a middle layer so that, from Capture Center, we could communicate directly with PeopleSoft,” says Mike James, President, Informa Software.

Since this automation is a significant change from previous AP processes, Knust took a measured approach to rolling it out. Once each automated function was working well, they released it. “We spent additional time up front to learn the capabilities of the software.

As we use it, we are able to fine-tune it to meet our unique needs with the help of Informa. We plan to fully utilize the automation capabilities of the system later in the year by letting invoices go through with little or no human intervention,” she explains.

As part of the automation process, the school board is now encouraging vendors to email invoices instead of sending them paper invoices that require scanning. “One of the things we’ve set up are email portals so that Palm Beach County School Board can encourage their vendors to email them the invoices. Then we pick them up directly from within Capture Center and process them that way,” says James. “We’ve gotten a number of vendors to the point where ultimately, once they get the go-ahead, all those invoices can be processed totally electronically—they are automatically fed from Capture Center into PeopleSoft and out comes a paper check, without any individual work required.”

Accepting invoices via email eliminates the need to manually open mail and sort all the invoices. Capture Center offers rule-based classification, extraction, and verification tools. “We don’t have to sort invoices out anymore because we’ve automated that as well,” explains Knust. “With certain vendors like Office Depot, where we’re getting hundreds of invoices a week, we’re going to be able to automate that process to where an AP person isn’t even going to have to look at them.”

Bob Rucinski, AP Manager at Palm Beach County School Board, agrees. “We’re very close to having invoices flow through our system from the email mailbox all the way to the paper check, without any human intervention,” he says. Though not in the immediate scope of this cost-savings initiative, the team looks forward to one day eliminating the paper checks as well.



Benefits

Improved Productivity and Reduced Resources

Even before it was fully deployed, Capture Center's reduced manual processing and paper handling resulted in significant gains. Before starting the scanning process, an invoice was touched at least five times before it reached the check printing stage. Rucinski states: "We've eliminated at least four of those processes with the Capture Center scanning project." Invoice management has been accelerated by using a digital workflow right from the start. "With OpenText Capture Center, we're processing more invoices per day with half the number of staff than when we were doing it manually," says Ken Kohler, PeopleSoft Functional Specialist.

In addition, with fewer invoices coming through the mail, there's been a reduction in staff time spent handling and sorting paper. "I had a position before where the sole function was to take a copy of the check and match it up with the paper invoice and then file it. That position has been eliminated with this process, because there is nothing to match up or file anymore," shares Knust. In fact, Knust will be able to reduce the AP technical staff. "As a result of implementing this project I was able to eliminate three AP techs through attrition, bringing the department down to six. When I started eight years ago, we had 16." And beyond AP, the system has grown to now automate the next phase for the district, automating invoices for food services and utilities.

Enhanced Visibility and Tracking

The automation of invoice handling has also resulted in complete visibility into the status of invoices. Rucinski explains, "Paper invoices might sit on someone's desk for a period of time. We had no visibility into where those invoices were or how old they were. Now they are scanned automatically on the day they arrive. From the time it's scanned to the time it's paid, we know where it is." By keeping track of documents, the team reduces compliance risks, facilitates auditing, and improves vendor relations with more timely payments and fewer lost invoices that have to be reissued.



About Informa

Since 2001 Informa Software has provided business productivity solutions including content management, RightFax, LANFax, document imaging, data capture and business process automation. Informa focuses on three main business solution offerings – software product development, partner solution integration (OpenText, Microsoft, HP, DocuSign, Nintex), and systems application consulting. Informa offers the tools, personnel, and business expertise to allow companies to reduce operating costs, manage risk, and maximize productivity. Informa's subject matter expertise as well as business process design experience allows them to help organizations quickly get to the root of their problems and implement timely and cost effective solutions. As a premier technology solution partner, Informa provides a single source for technology products, services, integration, configuration, deployment, installation and infrastructure support.

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Paper Storage Cost Reductions and Efficiencies

With Capture Center, the team has also been able to automate the process related to records retention and save money on paper storage. "We no longer physically store any paper invoices. They are stored and filed electronically, eliminating the possibility of misfiling a paper invoice. Then based on the type of invoice it is, whether operational or capital expenditure, we apply different record retention periods systematically," explains Knust.

Storing invoices by check number was very cumbersome. "The retention period differs based on funding. When we stored invoices in a box sequentially by check number, there was no way to decipher the fund number and it meant that we had to keep all of the invoices. But now with the new electronic storage process, the funding is linked back to the invoice. Record retention guidelines are mapped based on the fund and the document image will be automatically disposed of based on the established guidelines," says Knust.

Satisfaction Guaranteed

While efficiencies and savings have been the driving factors, staff satisfaction has been a side benefit of this initiative. "When we started working on this project, the AP staff were very reluctant to move to a new way of doing things. But recently, having been live for a couple of months, we had a memory issue on our server and, for one day, we had to go back to the old way of doing things. The staff complained vigorously about how laborious it was the old way," comments Rucinski.

Future

Looking ahead, Knust and her team anticipate graduating to the next phase of the solution, which is to tackle invoices for construction, as well as receipt processing.

The future looks even more promising as Knust strives to achieve even greater efficiencies and savings for Palm Beach County School Board. Says Knust of her ultimate plan: "My goal is to maximize productivity utilizing state of the art technology to achieve my vision of a paperless AP department."

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