SUEZ: SUSTAINABLE INVOICING IN A SUSTAINABLE WORLD

SUEZ RECOVERY & RECYCLING (SUEZ) HAS MADE THE JOURNEY FROM 100% PAPER INVOICING, TO SETTING UP A SHARED SERVICE CENTER WITH AUTOMATED INVOICE PROCESSING. NOT SATISFIED TO STOP THERE, THEY HAVE PUSHED AHEAD WITH E-INVOICING - OFFERING MULTIPLE CHANNELS THROUGH WHICH THEIR SUPPLIERS CAN SEND THEM E-INVOICES. THEY HAVE ALSO SWITCHED TO SENDING E-INVOICES. THEIR GOAL IS 100% E-INVOICING BY 2020.

SUEZ is the leading company for sustainable waste management in the Netherlands. In an industry where ‘waste’ is already in the name, it’s all about leading by example and keeping unnecessary, expensive and time-wasting paper invoices to a minimum. In addition to the environmental benefits, digital invoice workflows make business processes clearer and more efficient.

Serge Flantua has been working at SUEZ since 1996, and has seen them develop from a ‘regular’ garbage collection company to a forward-thinking organization dedicated to sustainable waste management. Flantua is Director of Shared Services, and is responsible for the financial lines of SUEZ North European Waste Services. Flantua explains:

“SUEZ stands for the collection, processing and transformation of waste into raw materials. In addition to household garbage, we used to pick up all kinds of waste from printers, bakers, and other industrial sectors, only to bring it to the waste depot. But that was the SUEZ of fifteen or twenty years ago. In 2014, waste collection is more like urban mining: reclaiming materials in order to bring them back into the production chain.”

SHARED SERVICE CENTER (SSC) FOR ACCURATE REPORTING

Over the years, SUEZ has taken over tens of smaller businesses which had their own processes and administration. SUEZ has implemented a Shared Service model. Flantua explains why: “As you grow, on the one hand

CUSTOMER:

INDUSTRY:
Waste Management/Utilities/Recycling

LOCATION:
Arnhem, Nederland

BASWARE SOLUTIONS:

- Basware Invoice
- Basware Match
- 100% e-Invoice Receiving
- BT Sender
you want full insight into and control over your activities and to be able to report on them. On the other hand, you want to optimize your business processes. Those two things go hand-in-hand in a Shared Service Center. You can bundle skill sets, create efficiencies and improve processes and data quality.”

He continues: “The Shared Service Center model enables holistic reporting – to give management access to accurate information for decision-making, while providing the information needed to make the AP organization more efficient. The goal is to have clear invoicing, to pay suppliers on time, and to be able to report costs. You just can’t achieve that in a cut-and-paste administrative landscape where everyone has their own work methods.”

The process had to improve qualitatively. “To make that happen, you need to have a structural overview of your financial processes. We started with receiving, registering and forwarding invoices centrally. Then we looked at the next step: how do you get approval for payment? We searched for a way to do that. ‘From paper to digital’ was the answer, and Basware had the solution,” explains Flantua.

When Flantua started with SUEZ, only 20 employees had their own email accounts. And when the first steps were made toward a central administration, it was a 100% paper workflow.

Flantua describes what it was like in those days: “Automated workflows for invoices in our industry were completely non-existent in 1997, not to mention electronic invoicing. To give you an idea: invoices came in, envelopes were opened, invoices were stamped, initialed in a few places, and then registered and paid by the local administrator. That was the invoicing process. The disadvantages of that kind of process are well-known: invoices get lost, are doubled-up, or get misplaced in drawers. When you centralize your administration, it needs to be done digitally. Especially if you’re receiving about 600 invoices per day, or roughly 10,000 per month.”

The move to e-invoicing with help from Basware

SUEZ has gone beyond invoice automation. “From 2002 to 2009, everything was focused on Invoice Processing. How do I get my invoices under control?
How do I set up digital workflows, and how can I match with PO numbers?” explains Flantua.

He continues:

“BUT THEN, WE ALSO HAD THE BURNING DESIRE TO AUTOMATE INVOICE RECEIVING, SO THAT WE DIDN’T HAVE TO SCAN ALL OF THE INVOICES OURSELVES. AGAIN, WE CHOSE BASWARE. WE ARE ALSO SENDING E-INVOICES NOW: APPROXIMATELY TWO MILLION INVOICES ANNUALLY.”

CHALLENGES WITH GETTING SUPPLIERS ON BOARD

SUEZ has 100% e-invoice exchange, over the Basware Network, with some of its key suppliers, but some smaller suppliers need more persuading. Flantua explains: “Right now, only 30% of the incoming invoices are received direct to digital. I’d like to see that percentage grow to 100%. The other 70% also comes in digitally to SUEZ, but requires an extra step with the post scan OCR process. When we moved to e-invoicing in 2009, I thought that a memo to my suppliers would be enough to bring them around. A year later, we’re only at 30%. That indicates that the acceptance of e-invoicing is poorly developed in the Netherlands.”

Flantua understands the benefits of true e-invoicing: “PDF is seen as digital invoicing, but in my opinion, a PDF is not a digital invoice. In my position, I need data, not an invoice template. The template does have its place, but I’m purely concerned about the data. Scanning the invoice so you can send it as a PDF is, to me, just as old-fashioned as an invoice in a stamped envelope.”

ADVANTAGES OF AN OPEN NETWORK LIKE THE BASWARE NETWORK

“I am surprised that there is still no standard so that systems can communicate with each other. One of the reasons why I chose

BENEFITS: INCREASED EFFICIENCY AND COST SAVINGS

Automating and digitalizing business processes provides efficiency and cost savings. “It has made a big difference in the number of AP employees we need. “Automation saves us at least 70% on personnel costs within Accounts Payable. We used to have thirty employees working for us - now we’re doing the same work with a team of five.”

SIGNIFICANT EFFICIENCY
the Basware Network in 2009 was its open nature. As long as there is no single platform with a simple layout or base, you need some kind of intermediary form,” Flantua says.

GOAL: 100% E-INVOICING
When asked if there will ever be a year in which they will be 100% digital, Serge Flantua responds:

“LET’S BE AMBITIOUS: WE WILL HAVE REACHED THAT IN 2020! WE’RE WASTING A LOT OF TIME AND ENERGY ON DATA TRANSFER THAT HAS NO ADDED VALUE FOR ANYONE.”

He continues, “But you have to build every-thing from the ground up. You need to optimize your invoicing process. You have to set up your AP department properly, but you also have to have clear agreements with your supplier about how they submit invoices. In summary: all of the elements have to fit together so that your business can reap the benefits of AP automation.”

ABOUT SUEZ
SUEZ Netherlands B.V. provides recycling and waste management services which includes composting, business waste, security shredding, residential waste, energy from waste, green energy generation, landfill engineering, and street cleansing.

SUEZ Netherlands B.V. is based in Arnhem, the Netherlands. SUEZ Netherlands B.V. operates as a subsidiary of Suez Environnement Company SA.

ABOUT BASWARE
Basware is the global leader in providing purchase-to-pay solutions, e-invoicing and innovative financing services. Basware’s commerce and financing network connects businesses around the globe. As the largest open business network in the world, Basware provides scale and reach for organizations of all sizes, enabling them to grow their business and unlock value across their operations by simplifying and streamlining financial processes. Small and large companies around the world achieve significant cost savings, more flexible payment terms, greater efficiencies and closer relationships with their suppliers.

Find out more at:
WWW.BASWARE.COM