

Panasonic standardizes invoice processing throughout Europe

Panasonic

Since 2008/2009 Panasonic Europe Ltd., the world's leading manufacturer of electronic consumer products, has been using an SAP-based workflow, developed by xSuite, at its locations throughout Europe. The xSuite Invoice solution is used for electronic processing of previously paper-based incoming invoices and credit notes. More than 800 users now validate easily and quickly about 75,000 invoices a year.

The electronic processing of incoming invoices enables companies, especially those operating on an international level, significantly to reduce the costs of processing a large number of invoices arriving at a range of locations and to create a transparent accounting system. In the past Panasonic Europe Ltd. was using a non-SAP workflow solution. "We wanted to replace it with a system that is directly integrated in SAP," remarked Dirk Bammann, General Manager European Projects. The product of choice became xSuite Invoice. The software offers Panasonic a best-practice workflow that can be used throughout Europe. The workflow can be modified to suit to the individual country-specific processes, for instance local agent determination or special local F4 help functions. Furthermore, xSuite Invoice is SOX-compliant and allows the company, as a result of its complete document history among other advantages, to meet SOX requirements for invoice processing.

International implementation team

Once the contract had been awarded, an implementation team was set up from various resources distributed worldwide. The team's task was to coordinate the technologies of the individual project partners and to prepare the pan-European roll-out of the workflow solution. This involved IBM for the archiving component with an IBM content server, HP for the hardware, xSuite and Aequitas GmbH & Co. KG as Panasonic's external IT services provider.

Company

Web: www.panasonic.de
Sector: Industry
Location: Hamburg, Germany

xSuite® solution

- SAP integrated incoming invoice processing

Decisive arguments for xSuite

- SAP integrated solution
- Overall stability and efficiency of solution
- Prospect of future standardized workflow process that is dynamic and scalable

Systems integration

- SAP ECC 6.0, IBM Content Server, HP hardware

The project started in February 2008; when the groundwork had been completed, xSuite Invoice first went live in the UK subsidiary in October 2008, followed by the Nordic countries in January 2009 and two months later by Germany and Austria.

xSuite Invoice is installed in Bracknell, Hamburg and Stockholm. All invoices from the UK are sent to the central facility in Bracknell, where they are scanned; invoices from Germany and Austria are transmitted to Hamburg, while Stockholm receives all the documents from Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark. After scanning, an intelligent data extraction software automatically extracts the relevant invoice data and validates them against the master data stored in SAP. When done with the OCR validation invoice data and images are transferred to xSuite Invoice running on SAP Business Workflow.

xSuite Invoice automatically transfers the documents to the appropriate sites, where they are verified and released by local personnel. A total of 800 employees are involved in this verification and release process throughout Europe. Panasonic is scanning its documents with the Panasonic flat bed scanner KV-S7075C, which is characterized by excellent paper handling, an outstanding image resolution and innovative image enhancement technology as well as an exceptionally robust assembly. Applying this scanner type will simplify and secure the whole invoice capturing process.

Workflow is based on SAP standards

Dirk Bammann: "Today we map our entire invoice verification using the xSuite Invoice workflow solution, which is based on SAP standards. As a result we are able to achieve extensive standardization for processing invoices and credit notes throughout Europe. There is no longer any need to transport paper documents and all people involved can view the release status of their invoice at any time."

xSuite Invoice is based on a generic solution that offers a large number of functions, including the customized arrangement of individual workflow steps, central user administration and the generic text system. All verification and release steps are available inside and outside SAP (via WEB access). A central incoming invoice ledger provides the required transparency.

Optimized cash-flow

Speeding up the processes also reduces processing costs. Thanks to the improved transparency, all cash discount periods can now be adhered to, and the work involved in capturing the data has also decreased: Accounting staff previously employed to enter invoice data manually in SAP systems can now be used more effectively.

Panasonic & xSuite

The new solution offers further benefits for the heads of the accounts departments in the individual countries:

“With xSuite Invoice we can, for instance, access comprehensive reports about invoice statuses, thereby allowing us to optimize our cash-flow planning,” was the enthusiastic comment from Holger Huber, General Manager Finance & Accounting Centre.

xSuite has managed to link into the SAP ERP system via its “xSuite Interface”, an SAP-certified interface for process integration in SAP NetWeaver. This allows Panasonic to map “early” and “late” archiving via SAP ArchiveLink and to link different file formats to any SAP business objects – useful functions when processing incoming invoices.

“We can transfer invoice header and item data together with images of those invoices to our SAP system,” explained Dirk Bammann, “the interface validates the transferred data values by checking that they are correct and carries out completeness checks. A special monitoring function allows our employees to monitor the status of all invoices – and to edit and process them.”