

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE

Achieving 75% Touchless Invoice Processing

Combining automated accounts payable (AP) from Esker with digitized document management through Esker partner Enlighten.Net created invoice processing magic for Birmingham Fastener.

Here is their story.



ESKER®

AT A GLANCE

Birmingham Fastener

 Distribution and manufacturing

 Established in 1980

 748 employees

 20 locations across the U.S. and Mexico

 ERP: Epicor P21



Challenges

Struggling to keep up with company growth while buried in messy manual work

As the U.S. leader in nuts and bolts distribution as well as the largest global manufacturer of T-Head bolts, Birmingham Fastener's business continues to expand rapidly. Despite making progress in modernizing their AP activities, their process still required a large amount of manual work.

The company had already transitioned to receiving 80% of their invoices via email and partnered with Enlighten. Net to digitize and organize their documentation using ENet Docs. But the day-to-day workload was still highly manual, fixing problems on invoices was time-consuming, departmental communication was disjointed and trying to track metrics was a nightmare.

"In the past nine years, we've more than tripled in size," says Diane Early, Director of Corporate Accounting at Birmingham Fastener. "We knew we couldn't hire enough people fast enough to keep up with the workload. We needed an automation solution that worked for our industry that could help us speed up our AP process."

In addition, the company's AP leaders wanted their team to have the time to focus on handling exceptions, researching anomalies and resolving complex problems instead of being data entry drones chained to their keyboards all day.

Objectives

- Improve efficiency and accuracy across the entire AP process in order to keep up with company growth
- Reduce the need for manual data entry so the AP department can focus on higher-value tasks
- Implement an AP automation solution fully compatible with ENet Docs and their ERP infrastructure
- Create a centralized location for all departmental communication to minimize unnecessary back-and-forth
- Achieve greater visibility into AP performance with KPI tracking and transparency into invoice status with audit trails

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Diane Early
Director of Corporate Accounting,
Birmingham Fastener

Solution

An easy-to-integrate platform enabling greater efficiency, visibility & collaboration

“We were actually already using an AP automation system, but we realized it wasn’t really designed for the needs of our industry,” says Early. “That’s when our contacts at Enlighten.Net suggested we look at Esker.”

The Birmingham Fastener team quickly discovered Esker was the right fit thanks to helpful features such as:

- **Artificial intelligence** that monitors payment deadlines to prevent late payments and suggests the correct coding for invoice line items
- **Machine learning and deep learning capabilities** that recognize a variety of invoice layouts and structures and improve invoice data extraction accuracy over time
- **Touchless invoice processing** that automatically receives, reviews and approves invoices that meet certain criteria
- **Full visibility into the life of an invoice** with audit trails, documentation, and internal and external communication all tied to the related invoice
- **Comprehensive, customizable data analytics and reporting** for greater transparency into AP performance and improvement areas
- **Easy-to-use mobile app** that allows AP managers to approve invoices and review metrics from anywhere

In addition, Esker’s ability to integrate seamlessly with ENet Docs and their existing ERP environment meant the AP team members could quickly and easily access whatever information they needed in order to keep invoices moving.

“We’re always trying to improve our AP process — that’s why we went with Esker. Manual processes must be slayed. We’re constantly looking to bring more meaningful work to our people and get away from the mundane stuff that puts you to sleep. Esker has helped us achieve that.”

Brent Bynum

Accounting Manager, Birmingham Fastener





“After just one year of using Esker, 74.3% of our incoming PO invoices are posting automatically. Despite this tremendous early success, we’re realizing we’ve only scratched the surface of what Esker can help us accomplish.”

Diane Early
Director of Corporate Accounting,
Birmingham Fastener

Highlights

- Nearly 75% touchless processing rate for PO invoices
- 13% improvement in capturing payment discounts, from 85% to 98%
- AP team can absorb increasing invoice volumes without adding headcount
- Faster invoice processing requiring less manual work thanks to invoice data extraction and automated workflows
- 360-degree view into the life cycle of individual invoices, including audit trails, for faster resolution of complex or challenging invoices
- Full visibility into all aspects of invoice processing with comprehensive analytics tracking viewable on customizable dashboards
- Improved team morale due to less overwhelming workloads and more time to focus on AP tasks requiring critical thinking

Results

A streamlined AP function ready to handle whatever comes next

As Birmingham Fastener continues to grow, Esker’s AI-driven automation has allowed the AP team to keep pace with the expanding workload without needing to hire more people. In fact, after only one year using Esker, 74.3% of incoming PO invoices are posting automatically.

The AP team has also increased company cashflow by capturing more payment discounts. “Before Esker, we were missing 15 percent or more of available discounts,” says Dannie Sargent, Accounts Payable Manager at Birmingham Fastener. “Now we’re missing less than 2 percent. We created a report in Esker showing all invoices with available discounts that gets emailed to the team. Thanks to automation, we have the time to focus on taking advantage of those discounts instead of having to deal with all the minutia of invoice processing.”

A faster, more efficient AP process requiring less manual intervention means the team can shift their focus to improving their operations and working more effectively with other departments. “The wealth of analytics in Esker lets me see what the team is doing and areas that are slowing them down,” says Sargent. “If I notice they’re spending a lot of time reviewing invoices from a particular vendor, I can work with that vendor to get what we need to move them closer to having their invoices auto post. I also investigate ways I can work with upstream teams such as purchasing to make things work more smoothly when an invoice reaches us.”

But the team is just getting started. “As successful as we feel like we’ve been in our first year with Esker, we’re realizing that we’ve only scratched the surface of what Esker can help us accomplish,” says Early.

Want to transform your accounts payable process like Birmingham Fastener?

Our team is at your service.

About Esker

Esker, the leading AI Automation Suite for the Office of the CFO, offers Source-to-Pay and Order-to-Cash solutions built to optimize working capital and cashflow, enhance decision-making, and drive smarter growth strategies. Offering 40+ years of industry knowledge, Esker operates in North America, Latin America, Europe and Asia Pacific with global headquarters in Lyon, France, and U.S. headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin.

About Enlighten.Net

Founded in 2004, Enlighten.Net offers powerful document management tools and understands the unique challenges faced by distributors and manufacturers across North America. Enlighten.Net's software, ENet Docs, is used daily by thousands for the secure storage and instant retrieval of business-critical documents. Offering superior software and a concierge-level service experience for customers, Enlighten.Net is an Esker partner and reseller. sales@enlighten.net • www.enlighten.net

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