PROCUREMENT | ACCOUNTS PAYABLE

Taking Procurement & Accounts Payable to New Heights

How Brussels Airlines streamlined processes and boosted efficiency by unifying its procure-to-pay activities with Esker.

AT A GLANCE

Brussels Airlines

- Airline
- 3,500 employees
- Established 2006
- Brussels Airport, Belgium
- 8.4 million passengers yearly
- SAP ERP

Objectives

• Automate accounts payable
• Enable 3-way matching for procurement
• Centralize operations on one platform
• Enhance visibility with real-time reporting
• Improve efficiency and user experience
• Enable modern, mobile-friendly workflows

Challenges

Manual processes, limited visibility

Brussels Airlines, key member of the Lufthansa Group, was operating with a disconnected and manual procure-to-pay (P2P) process. The situation was particularly challenging for its Accounts Payable (AP) and Procurement teams, which were using a mix of outdated tools and manual methods.

The AP process was plagued by an archaic approval tool, an inflexible, 15-year-old in-house solution that was no longer supported by its third-party provider. This created a high-maintenance environment where resolving issues was nearly impossible and everyday tasks were overly complicated. The booking of invoices was a long, manual process, as every single field had to be filled in by hand. Furthermore, a lack of mobile capabilities meant approvers had to be physically logged into their computers via a VPN, making the entire workflow inefficient and frustrating.

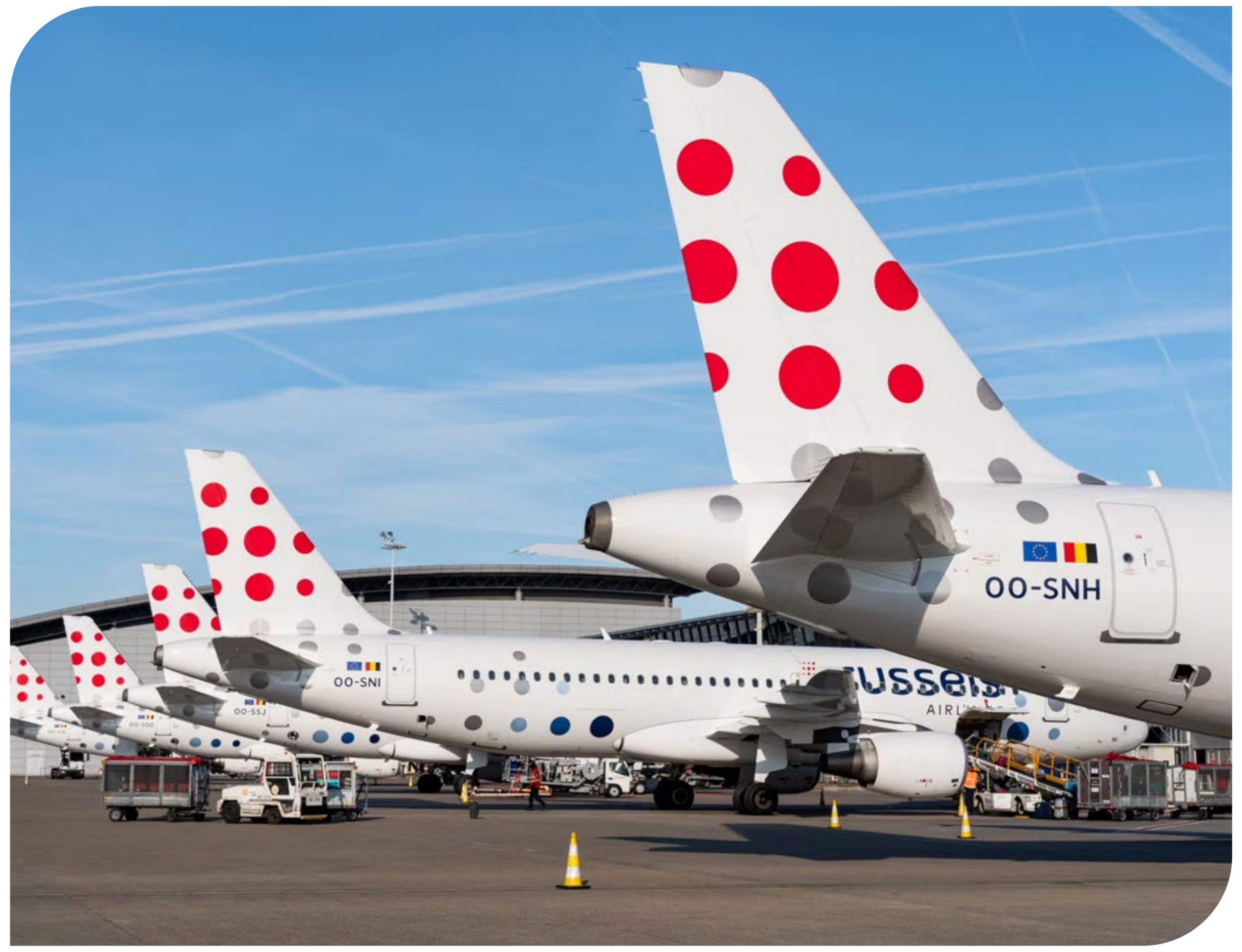
On the procurement side, the situation was equally stifling. "Our processes were a maze of disconnected systems," explained Elisabetta Castaldo, Purchase to Pay Accounting Manager. The team was relying on a limited in-house application that provided a basic approval workflow but was completely disconnected from the invoicing process. This meant that critical functions like 3-way matching and goods receipts were nonexistent. The system lacked an audit trail and the ability to attach supporting documents or contracts, and purchase orders were generated as static PDFs, providing zero transparency.

With no central reporting tool, both the AP and Procurement teams had to manually extract data into Excel to get a semblance of visibility, which severely limited their ability to make informed decisions.

In 2023, it became increasingly clear that the company urgently needed to not only replace outdated tools but also unify automated invoice processes in the cloud, and Esker did exactly that.

"We had a highly manual accounts payable process. The approval tool was outdated, unsupported and too inflexible to meet our needs."

Ines Cracco
IT Business Solutions Manager Shared Services,
Brussels Airlines



Solution

Unified platform, global reach

The pursuit of a cutting-edge solution led Brussels Airlines to Esker, influenced by its strategic adoption across Lufthansa Group Business Services. This alignment was a crucial factor, but it was Esker's innate flexibility that truly sealed the deal. Unlike other solutions that might force a rigid implementation, Esker offers a platform that unifies both AP and procurement under a single, integrated system, while adapting to Brussels Airlines' unique needs across its diverse global locations. The seamless integration of both functions promised to eliminate the manual, siloed workflows that had long hindered efficiency.

Esker Accounts Payable brings a comprehensive suite of tools designed to address the specific challenges the airline was facing. For AP, the platform automates invoice processing, allowing for sophisticated features like the grouping of approvers and parallel approvals, which was not possible with the old tool. The introduction of Esker Anywhere™, a user-friendly mobile application, enables approvers to review and approve invoices on the go. Internal conversations now happen directly within the workflows, creating a single, trackable thread of communication that replaced messy email chains. Ines Cracco, IT Business Solutions Manager Shared Services and former Procure to Pay Manager at Brussels Airlines, said that the internal conversation functionality is a very big plus that makes everyone's life so much easier because employees don't have to write a whole email each time.

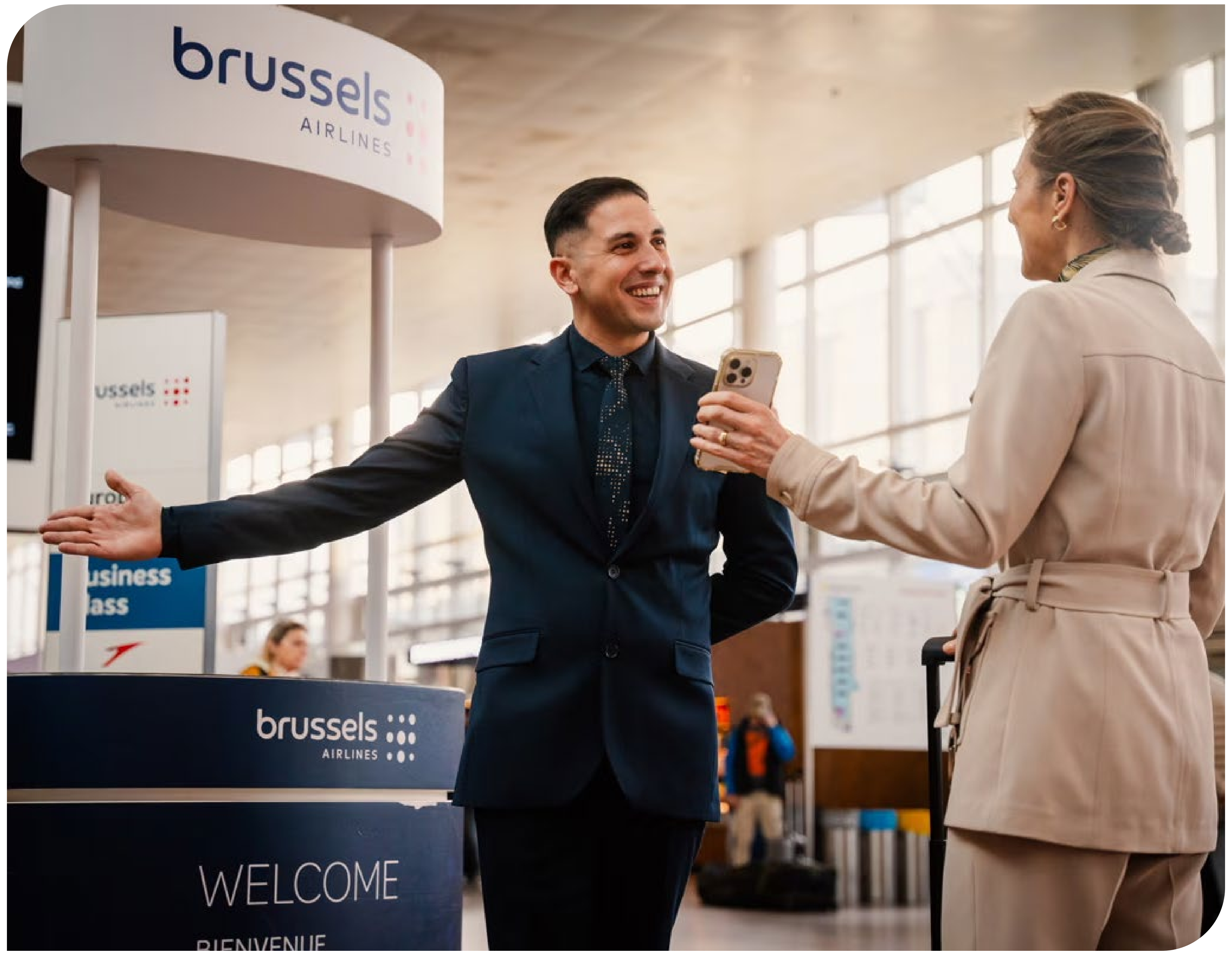
Procurement processes were also significantly streamlined. Esker Procurement proved capable of efficiently managing the airline's complex, multi-location business, including its crucial operations in Africa, all without the need for an SAP MM module integration. This was a key differentiator, as a flexible, multi-ERP approach was essential to their operational model.

The team received specialized training to handle Esker's AI-powered auto-learning feature, which was a critical step in ensuring the accurate capture of complex, airline-specific invoice formats like IATA. The ability to teach AI to recognize and extract data from each document has proven to be a powerful feature, addressing a major pain point and setting the stage for a new level of automation.

The implementation was a collaborative effort. Esker's responsive teams ensured that everyone was well-equipped to manage and optimize the new system. The result was a surprisingly quick and smooth implementation that laid the groundwork for a complete transformation of Brussels Airlines' financial processes.

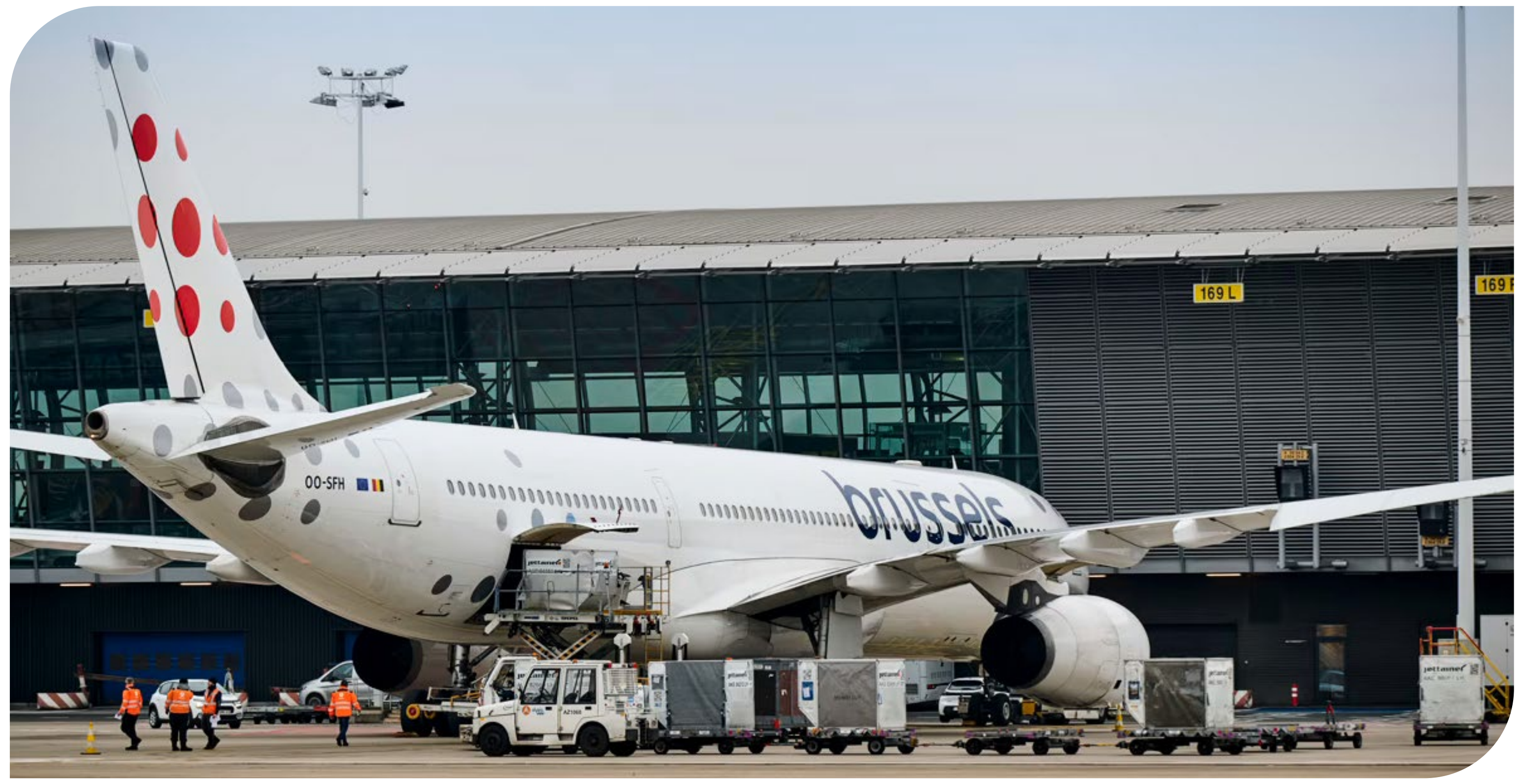
"The flexibility of Esker allowed us to have multiple locations, which was a big advantage over other solutions we looked at."

Elisabetta Castaldo
Purchase to Pay Accounting Manager, Brussels Airlines



“We can post invoices so much easier now; it’s really positive feedback all around.”

Ines Cracco
IT Business Solutions Manager Shared Services,
Brussels Airlines



Highlights

- 93% automation consistency
- 7% improvement in invoice processing
- 84% growth in POs in the first year
- 450% rise in PO spend management

Results

Efficiency, accuracy, visibility

The transition to a unified Esker platform delivered tangible and impressive results across Brussels Airlines’ financial operations, providing the Office of the CFO with unprecedented visibility and control. The consolidation of AP and procurement processes onto a single platform streamlined workflows and enhanced compliance and collaboration across departments. This integrated approach, with its comprehensive dashboards, gives the teams real-time visibility into performance metrics and errors, which was entirely absent in their previous manual environment. The transparency and clear audit trails provided by the new system provide everyone, from frontline users to approvers, with a precise view of who has done what and when.

One of the most immediate and impactful results was the widespread positive feedback from users. The shift from an outdated, non-mobile tool to a modern, user-friendly platform with a mobile app was a game changer. Employees can now approve invoices on the go, dramatically accelerating approval cycles and improving overall efficiency. This newfound speed and ease-of-use is felt keenly by the AP team, as they are now able to post invoices much more quickly. The invoice posting automation rate reached 93%, and the AP team saw a 7% increase in invoices processed, reflecting significant gains in productivity.

For procurement, the results are equally impressive. Purchase orders increased from 1,330 before Esker to 2,455 in the first year of Esker implementation, marking 84% growth. Even more striking, the spend managed through purchase orders jumped from €11.2 million to €62.7 million during that same period, a 450% increase, demonstrating the solution’s impact on controlling and scaling procurement operations.

The adoption of Esker’s AI-powered technology has proven to be a significant asset. Despite initial concerns about the complexity of invoicing for the airline industry, the custom training on the auto-learning feature empowered the team to achieve a high degree of automation. Esker’s ability to handle global operations without connectivity issues has been a major relief, allowing teams in all regions to work efficiently.

The project introduced a “No PO, No Pay” policy, requiring that all invoices be matched to a valid purchase order before payment. While this objective remains a work in progress due to the scale of change management required, the overall success of the project is undeniable. The implementation has not only solved immediate pain points but also provides a future-proof foundation for continuous improvement. Brussels Airlines now has the tools to make data-driven decisions and continue its journey toward a fully automated and efficient financial ecosystem.

Want to automate your P2P processes like Brussels Airlines?

Get in touch with Esker

About Esker

Esker's AI Automation Suite for the Office of the CFO leverages the latest in Agentic AI and automation technologies to optimize working capital and cashflow, enhance strategic decision-making, and improve human-to-human relationships with customers, suppliers and employees. Esker's Source-to-Pay and Order-to-Cash solutions automate any business process while supporting long-term 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.

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