REFERENCE STORY

Strenge: easy invoice puts an end to archiving invoices on pallets

content

about Strenge GmbH & Co. KG

Strenge was founded in 1961 as a commercial agency in Gütersloh and has grown over its 60-year history into a B2B wholesaler recognized throughout Europe. The East Westphalian company is now managed in the second generation by the three sons of company founder Hans Martin Strenge. In addition to an online store and an e-procurement system for MRO articles, Strenge also develops and manufactures cardboard packaging, offers a repair and maintenance service and has its own logistics department. The company has approximately 150 employees working at three locations in the region.

From packaging, office materials and work clothing to cleaning products – every company needs MRO articles (maintenance, repair and operations). So it's no wonder that the MRO market in Europe alone is worth several hundred billion euros. Strenge GmbH in Gütersloh, just outside Bielefeld, has specialized in packaging in this segment and has enjoyed decades of success with this business strategy.

In order to survive in such a competitive business field in the internet age, this family company places particular emphasis on service quality and efficient operating processes. Consequently, digitizing business processes is a perfectly natural fit for the East Westphalian wholesaler. The company has been active in online business for years and offers its customers e-procurement solutions for digitizing their procurement process.

digitization of the incoming invoice process

Another example of this forward-looking company policy is invoice management. Strenge began converting incoming invoice processing from an analog to a digital workflow using easy invoice in conjunction with easy archive back in 2012. Dr. Frank Bettenworth, who has been driving digitalization at Strenge for 19 years as Head of IT, was responsible for the project:

"In the analog process, order-related and cost-related invoices had to be handled differently – like invoices for merchandise, insurance or the vehicle fleet. Digitization eliminates this manual effort: All invoices can now be processed uniformly and efficiently."

The processing of invoices not connected to an order was especially time-consuming, since the paper invoices had to be handed out around the company for signing:

"We still signed the invoices by hand, then took them to the accounts department and handed them in for posting."

When employees were on vacation, the invoices were left lying around and by the end of the vacation, a pile of invoices had accumulated on the desk that first had to be processed.

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easy invoice shortens your entire invoice verification process from entry to approval.

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- and many other advantages

no more archiving with a forklift

These problems are familiar to every company that has to manually move invoices around the office to get them signed. However, what exacerbated the situation for Strenge as a wholesaler, was the sheer mass of resulting documents:

"Back then, around 85 to 90 percent of invoices were still received by post," recalls Frank Bettenworth.

For a long time, Strenge had an employee whose main task was to sort the paper invoices into folders for archiving and, after a year, to store them in a warehouse on the company campus, shrink-wrapped on pallets:

"If one of these invoices was needed, you called the logistics department, where a warehouse worker took a forklift, found the relevant folder and pulled out the invoice."

In the past, at least one structured pallet had to be stored each year – taking up considerable space over time. Digital archiving frees up storage space and completely eliminates disposal costs once the retention period has expired.

optimal interaction between invoice processing and archiving

But digitization has made these conditions a thing of the past. The value of this change became especially clear to Strenge during the coronavirus pandemic:

"This really helped us move forward, especially during this time,"
says Frank Bettenworth.

Thanks to the interaction between easy invoice and easy archive, all processors can access each process file independently and deal with it quickly.

To simplify things even further, Strenge also uses the easy solution to archive all outgoing documents from the ERP system in addition to the invoices: *"Everything from an offer to an order confirmation to a delivery bill."* For example, if a customer has questions about an order, the processor can quickly find the process file in the archive and send the relevant documents by email. This is also extremely important to Strenge because it enhances the quality of service provided, which is vital for the survival of a medium-sized wholesaler in today's competitive market.

seamless system integration

One decisive success factor for the efficiency of digitizing all incoming invoice processing at Strenge is the smooth integration between the archiving system, the ERP system and financial accounting. Sophisticated interfaces ensure that archived documents can be accessed directly from the specialist applications at any time – without changing systems and without time-consuming search processes.

Regardless of whether a processor works in merchandise management, customer service or accounting: The relevant documents can be accessed quickly, securely and in context. This extensive networking not only increases the speed of day-to-day business, it also helps prevent errors and satisfy compliance requirements.

greater transparency

Another major advantage for Strenge has proven to be the enormous gain in transparency that easy invoice has brought to accounting. In the past, goods often reached the wholesaler ahead of the invoice because it took longer to mail the invoice by post than it did to deliver the goods. But sending invoices in electronic form has reversed the situation. The invoice usually arrives before the goods. Thanks to easy invoice, it is much easier to check whether the goods have actually arrived before the payment goes out.

Transparency is also the keyword when it comes to payment processes in the company in general: Because digitization means that every invoice is automatically recorded when it is received, the accounting department can see exactly how high the outstanding amounts are at all times, especially for invoices not connected to an order. The financial accounting department benefits from being able to check in the software exactly where an invoice may have gotten stuck in the approval process, and they can also initiate the process if necessary.

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cuts staff work-load in half

Another positive impact of digitizing the incoming invoices is the increased efficiency of the entire process. Frank Bettenworth estimates that the total workload for processing and archiving invoices has been halved since the software was introduced.

It is important to emphasize that the efficiency gains of digital incoming invoice processing grow over time: Thanks to the invoice process, the accounting department at Strenge is now able to process numerous order-related invoices without any human intervention. The system automatically compares the invoice with the order and initiates the payment process if there is a 100% match.

small steps and an open mind are key to success

To achieve all this, Frank Bettenworth was careful to introduce the software in small, iterative steps, and he considered how the old, established processes could be improved with the new system. It is also important not to neglect the human factor. After all, such projects require a lot of persuasion, especially at the beginning. His advice on this is:

"Get colleagues in the specialized departments on board at an early stage and give them a role in shaping the transformation."

A pragmatic approach to change also helps ensure success. For example, it has proven useful for the accounting department to give the processors a second monitor to assist with the switch to digital incoming invoice processing. This allows them to call up the receipt on one monitor and make the booking in the software on the second monitor.

"the workload for processing and archiving invoices on the accounting side alone has been roughly halved since the introduction of the software."

Dr. Frank Bettenworth
IT Manager
Strenge GmbH & CO. KG

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