



Electronic Invoice Processing at IBA: Approval Flow Comes to Life



IBA (Ion Beam Applications S.A.), headquartered in Belgium and listed on the EURONEXT pan-European stock exchange, houses 1,500 employees and is a world leader in particle accelerator technology. Specializing in proton therapy solutions (currently considered as the most advanced form of radiation therapy), IBA is also a leading player in the fields of industrial sterilization, radiopharmaceuticals and dosimetry.

While technologically at the forefront of its core business, IBA's basic administrative and clerical processes have largely been paper-based, a fact which has naturally led to manual handling of processes and prevented digitalization and automation from maturing at the company. Not only were the invoices arriving daily by letter post distributed to departments in the classic way by circular file, even e-mails containing PDF invoices were printed out rather than simply being forwarded.

Checks and releases were performed manually or by e-mail. After processing, invoices were filed in paper folders, even requiring rental of new archive spaces later in the game. In an effort to track invoice status in the approval process, or the number of documents to be posted, an Excel spreadsheet was updated on a daily basis. All in all, it was a time-consuming procedure, prone to error, with a significant amount of manual effort and an inconvenient lack of clarity.

“Sure, our processes were routine, but there was no real flow. If a person had vacation or was ill, an invoice could easily be left unpaid. As a result, suppliers waited longer than necessary for their money, and we were unable to take advantage of cash discounts. Our top priority was to always know for sure that the right person had received the right document,” concludes Anouk Timochenkov, Accounting Manager at IBA.

Company

Web: iba-worldwide.com
Sector: Health Care
Location: Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium

xSuite solution

- SAP integrated invoice processing (xSuite Invoice)
- Digital archive in the cloud (xSuite Archive)

Why xSuite?

- Suitable solutions that exactly met the requirements

Systems integration

- SAP system

Image Source: Pictures with courtesy of IBA



So the medical technology provider sought a solution that would integrate into the existing SAP system and digitalize all invoice processing, with an aim to minimize manual effort and the risk of error. It was clear that there was simply no end to transmission errors when header and item data were manually typed from the invoice and entered into SAP. With an electronic solution that automatically extracts and transfers the data, on the other hand, this source of error would be eliminated. Therefore, in 2019, IBA decided to implement the xSuite Group's invoice workflow.

One main entrance

The first thing IBA did was to set up a central e-mail address for receiving invoices. This way, they ensured that nothing would get lost, and every supplier knew that if they didn't go through this route, their invoice wouldn't even be processed. In advance, vendors were also given instructions and advice on the structure their invoices should take and the format in which they should be submitted. These aspects now provide the conditions for the solution to recognize invoices well and process them quickly.

"These pre-project tasks were important, and we took several months to complete them," says Anouk Timochenkov. "They are the prerequisites for the success of a project of this sort."

During the actual implementation of the workflow, the project team then closely followed the best practices of the xSuite solution and performed as little individual customizing as possible. This helped keep the project lean and cost-effective. IBA receives approximately 24,000 e-mail invoices per year. They are now extracted and validated, i.e. compared against the SAP master data, as soon as they have been received in the central mailbox. The invoice workflow then sends the documents electronically to the approximately 1,000 users in the company for approval and release. Automated reminders ensure that not a single invoice stays with any individual longer than necessary. In addition, the Invoice Overview provides information on the processing status of all documents.

Image Source: Pictures with courtesy of IBA



Literally saving space

With invoice processing becoming fully digitalized, it was obvious that electronic archiving needed to be implemented as well. Now invoices are stored in the digital archive as soon as they are received. This way, no document can be lost or damaged during the approval and release process. IBA decided to go for xSuite's digital archive in the cloud. As the additionally rented quarters for paper archiving is no longer needed, the solution is literally saving space for IBA.

Better tracking and analysis

All this has created an organizational basis for posting and payment which is significantly faster than in the past. Thanks to electronic invoice receipt as well as xSuite's Invoice Overview, each document can be tracked seamlessly from the moment it arrives. Budget managers feel more responsible for "their" invoices and "the flow of approval has now really come to life," as Anouk Timochenkov puts it.

Anouk Timochenkov comments: "We are very satisfied with the support and project implementation by the xSuite Group. The consultants are dedicated and respond quickly and with competence to our inquiries."

One key performance indicator has already been achieved: After six months of live operation, IBA was able to assign a temporary employee in the accounting department to other tasks. All invoice processing tasks can now be handled by the remaining three specialists alone, which corresponds to savings of 25 percent in personnel.