

White Paper

# AP Automation Benefits From CFO to Sales



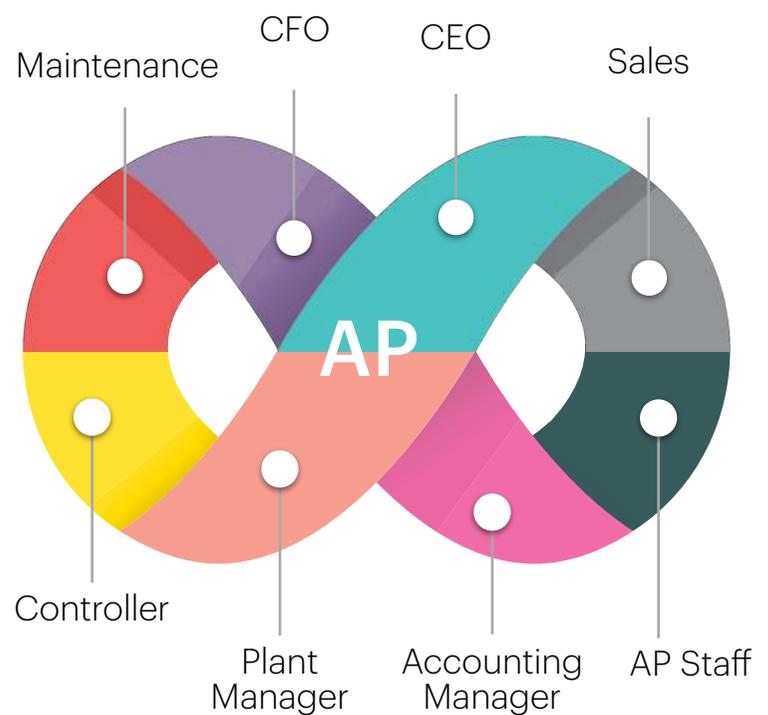
In this paper we show how the Palette Purchase to Pay solution has made a difference, role by role, to the people in an automotive manufacturing firm. It highlights how the technology can impact all of the people purchasing and invoice processing touches, empowering roles in the organization with transparency and accountability.

These scenarios highlight the importance of implementing a solution that has the flexibility to match the culture and complexity of the AP process. Many organizations have variables such as multiple locations, multiple ERPs, multiple currencies, and separate business processes.

**Software vendors in our space will often talk about the ROI of a P2P automation solution. That has merit, but instead of revisiting metrics such as processing time and dollars saved we would like to highlight the experience.**

In other words, exploring the day to day “before and after” user experience that all the roles AP touches. While some of these benefits can’t be calculated into direct savings, they are important. Who doesn’t want to reduce the administration aspects of their job, and increase performance so they can do their best? After all, performance is what you are paid for.

## AP Touches Numerous Roles Throughout the Organization



Our argument is that only after thousands of iterations based on the feedback of over 200,000+ users can we provide a platform that truly transforms the AP business process in a way that gives users more job satisfaction – on top of tangible business results for the organization.

*Palette empowers people throughout the organization with both visibility and accountability.*



## CEO

**You're very far removed from the actual manufacturing process and your focus is on the future – making sure the company is in the best position for growth.**

You're responsible for formulating and implementing the strategic plan that guides the direction of the entire organization.

You don't have patience for financial analysis that changes due to errors or other miscalculations. You may not have a lot of confidence in the reporting that is being provided to you.

Given a choice, you'd rather look forward to the future, rather than on what's happened in the past.

## AFTER

Financial reporting is accurate and not reliant on human intervention and stopgaps.

*"The entire organization is more productive, transactions are visible, and there is more accountability."*

You're forecasting with confidence because you are relying on live data – not dated results from amalgamated spreadsheets.

You are finding one click email approvals are efficient and fast. It's a process of opening a message and approving the expenditure right away, without having to learn a new program.

## CEO

*"I am more comfortable with forecasts."*





## CFO

**As the CFO, your focus is based on the financial performance of the entire organization. You rely heavily on your team to provide complete and accurate data in a timely fashion.**

You analyze the information they provide and report those results to the CEO. For scenarios that have a negative impact on the organization, you have to do some digging.

You have to identify the root cause of the situation to prevent those scenarios from happening again – and you usually have limited details of the transaction.

You are also responsible for banking relationships. You provide reporting that banks require on a specific schedule. You must be aware of, and most likely approve, major capital improvements.

You're in charge of the annual financial audit. This includes the ability to put controls in place as the auditing team sees necessary. These controls could be for fraud prevention as well as cost controls.

You have to understand what is included in your accrual postings to verify their validity.

Problems arise when you don't have accurate reporting. You have segments of the business in different software systems, and you need to merge all of the data into one 'big picture'.

If you have to make changes, you dissect the information from these different sources back down to segments, and then re-compile the data. This entire process relies heavily on second hand reports and other people's opinions – a labor intensive task that is prone to miscalculation and error.

## AFTER

You have real time reporting at your fingertips. You can drill down into any transaction to get the facts – rather than relying on "editorials" from various departments.

**"I have confidence compliance is being met because the company's business rules are running in the background behind every transaction."**

You finally have control of indirect spend. You make decisions based on accurate financial reporting - not guesswork or opinion.

You have simple email approvals for your executives. This makes them happy because they don't have to sign into "yet another" system.

There's a secure and transparent audit trail which keeps you happy because that ensures everyone is compliant.



## CFO



**"I have more confidence in the data at hand."**



## Plant Manager

**As a Plant Manager, you are responsible for everything that relates to your facility, from production levels and staffing to quality control.**

All the plant's department managers report directly to you, and you report to corporate headquarters. You are a step away from the actual manufacturing process, unless there's a problem.

When there is a situation with production that requires a purchase, you sign a carbon copy purchase order, since all indirect purchases are funnelled through your plant and not the purchasing department.

At times employees will bring you a carbon copy purchase order after they have given the PO number to a vendor to secure goods or services. This pre-committed spending happens no matter how hard you try to put procedures in place.

After all, it's human nature to do what you need to do to get your goods and services — and clean up the paperwork after the fact.

In this role, you might be under the impression your plant is profitable during any given period — until the end of the period when you are given trial balances and are reviewing them with the plant's controller.

This happens because you have no visibility into the data until after the period is closed, with the exception of manual spreadsheets that admin staff create to track all of those hard copy purchase orders. Not knowing where you stand at the end of the month keeps you up at night.

### AFTER

Palette provides real time tracking of purchase orders, giving you the confidence of knowing what is in the pipeline and how to manage your supplies.

*"Pre-committed spend is highlighted, so there are no surprises at the end of the month or end of the quarter."*

The system brings your role into the approval workflow for purchasing — but only when necessary. You avoid wasting time on administration that has no impact on your areas of responsibility.

Your plant's financial performance is visible before the period is closed.

You are empowered to make decisions to eliminate or postpone costs based on real-time data.

### Plant Manager

*"I can avoid administration that has zero impact on my areas of responsibility."*





## Plant Controller

**As a Plant Controller, you are responsible for the financial performance of your plant.**

You spend much of your time creating or modifying budgets based on meetings with department managers and your plant manager.

Those budgets are used to measure performance for each financial period, as well as the overall year-end totals. You have weekly meetings to make sure you know what is happening within the plant, which presses are down, what additional staffing needs are, and more.

You create estimates to give your CFO when you're worried about the danger of going over budgeted amounts.

You have an understanding of what parts are being manufactured. You know the profit margin of each job, as long as the job is running in the press it was calculated to be manufactured in – also known as the burden rate\* .

When disruptions occur, it is likely that you are included in meetings where decisions are being made but it is also possible that you are not included – a very common occurrence. You often learn about situations after they've been resolved. That's when you get a report on how much the issue cost the company.

*\*The burden rate is the allocation rate at which indirect costs are applied to the direct costs of either labor or inventory.*

One of your biggest frustrations is that you are not part or privy to any of the financial transactions for your plant. All direct material purchases are initiated from the purchasing and materials departments, and the indirect material purchases are handled at the plant level. You are not always made aware of the indirect purchases – even when you should be.

**Your signature is not required because it carries no financial authorization. This means that you have 100% responsibility and 0% authority where spending is concerned.**

You have a process that you follow at month end. This process includes verifying the activity in your GL accounts. The problem is you can only see the posting. You can't see the detail or the invoices that generated the posting. You create a list of all of the invoices that you need pulled, scanned and emailed so you can confirm that the correct GL account was used.

You also need to know what is included in the accrual posting for your locations. This is problematic because you are not the person that generated the accrual posting. The posting is comprised of spreadsheets that are a listing of all the invoices that are sitting in AP at the corporate office. You request a backup for the journal entry so you can better understand what is actually being accrued.



### Plant Controller

*"I can see what is happening rather than what happened."*



## AFTER

You have the opportunity to be part of the conversation around each and every purchase.

Your signature isn't needed for approvals on the purchase requisition, but you are ultimately responsible for the spend. You can set specific scenarios where you're added to the approval process – bringing you into the financial transactions and decisions when you need to be.

There are no surprises because you can see all of the transactions concerning your area of responsibility.

You can stop looking at “what happened” and start working on “what is happening” in real time.

*“Accrual reports are readily available. That includes the details of what makes up the total, complete with the invoice information.”*

Month end reporting is faster and can be saved and/or exported to Excel for further analysis and/or audit purposes.

You can run reports throughout the month and monitor the remaining amounts on your budgets as the month progresses.

When you are reconciling your GL accounts at month end, you don't need to rely on AP (or any other departments) to pull invoice copies to verify all of the charges in your GL accounts.



### Plant Controller

*“...and I'm included in the purchasing conversation.”*



## Accounting Manager

**You are responsible for AP, AR, capital accounting, general accounting, bank reporting and many other routine tasks. The vast majority of your time is spent focused on AP, either directly or indirectly.**

With AP consisting of paper and filing cabinets, it's difficult to have the information you need to perform these tasks accurately. Invoice processing times are lengthy and you have no visibility into amounts until they are posted to the GL.

Each invoice that is matched to a PO or goods receipt still needs to be touched at least 4 times and filed in 2 different places before it is posted to the GL. The invoice is touched and filed yet again when payment is made.

When exceptions come along, there's no limit to the time it could take to get the exception resolved and posted. If there is an issue that brings process problems to light you investigate and adjust the current business process in order to avoid the same issue again in the future. This means there are "patches upon patches", because users and vendors keep finding ways to avoid policy, either accidentally – or on purpose!

Sometimes the result of an issue is very unexpected. You might discover that one vendor is using you to suit their cash flow needs by delivering goods that you didn't need or use, or simply because you don't use POs for that vendor – you're just paying for anything that they deliver.

As the AP Manager, you are the person that has to deal with "fire drills" when a vendor puts your company on credit hold. You stop what you are working on, gather the facts of the situation, find out exactly where the paper invoice in question is, and communicate where the failure was with both the vendor and the department/location that was impacted by the credit hold.

One problem with these situations is that you don't have any insight on how long an invoice was out for approvals before it came back to AP for entry and payment. Because of this, it often looks like AP was the bottleneck that caused the credit hold.

**If a vendor knows your process isn't perfect, they can take advantage of that – and put you on credit holds earlier than if they had confidence in what you were doing.**

Month end close is just a fact of life that needs to be endured. You can only put so many manual tasks in place and still have confidence that you have accommodated all possible scenarios, just to learn that you haven't. Often the data that is collected is a series of inconsistent reports and spreadsheets.

This leaves you to perform a lot of behind -the-scenes analysis before releasing the data up the food chain to the controllers and the CFO. If you had data that was the 'single version of the truth' you could eliminate much of the manual oversight that only you are qualified to perform.

### Accounting Manager

*"I'm not dependent on a dozen different spreadsheets."*



**AFTER**

You have visibility and self-service reporting from all of the plants. You are no longer dependent on spreadsheets.

You're not searching through file cabinets. AP staff gain time from not having to file, un-file and re-file at each step.

You gain the confidence of management and your vendors.

Month end activities and report gathering is coming from a place where all of the data is accurate and exportable.

The process has removed non value added manual tasks.

*"You have visibility into both the transaction status and history, so that if a credit hold situation occurs you immediately have access to the problem."*

You have metrics available to watch the productivity of your AP staff. This allows you to have confidence in your team and to address areas of improvement when you see the need.

You are no longer the person that has to do other tasks that fall into the gap called 'someone has to figure it out' before the information can be used.

**Accounting Manager**

*"...and I have the confidence of vendors and management."*





## Accounting Manager

**You need a copy of every approved capital budget and every invoice for each capital budget.**

You also need to track multiple details such as the budgeted amounts and the dates the equipment was placed in service.

Once the equipment is placed in service, you create one asset for each piece of equipment – which typically means 2-3 assets for each budget.

You have a press, conveyors and a temperature control unit. If any of these items was used and refurbished, you need to capture the cost to refurbish them.

You are dependent on users that create purchase orders to write the capital budget number on each PO. All of the items being purchased are posted to one GL account.

You monitor the GL account, asking AP to pull and copy invoices so that you have them for the asset file.

From there you create a spreadsheet. You list each budget and all the PO's that are generated including the line item detail. You then list all the invoices for each of the PO's. You assign asset numbers to each asset, and then begin the depreciation process.

At the same time, you are tracking:

- all of the assets placed in service within a period.
- assets that you use as collateral for borrowing power with the bank

- assets that were used specifically for a single project/part number so that they can be disposed of at the end of a 4 year manufacturing timespan
- what plant assets are located in. Presses and jobs may be relocated to make them the most cost efficient.

This is difficult to manage in a company that is buying \$65M worth of equipment each year. You need to capture and identify each piece of equipment that is over \$500 in value.

### AFTER

**“I finally have a tool that links the entire transaction together – all the way from the capital budget to the requisition, the PO, the invoice, the payment and the asset number.”**

Typically you have a set of files or a drive where the capital budget information is kept. This information is not stored with the invoice transaction. The same is true for the asset number. This would likely be in a capitalization tool or spreadsheet. Palette provides fields for this data and any other details that you need linked.

In an audit situation, you are provided with a list of capital projects by the auditors. Not a problem – you have links to every piece of the transaction, including approvals and comments. This is both an auditing benefit as well as a capitalization benefit.

### Accounting Manager

*“I have the entire transaction chain linked together.”*



### Capitalization





## Maintenance Worker / Service Technician

**The maintenance worker's focus is to keep equipment running so that parts will be manufactured in time to keep customer's plants in production.**

With the introduction of Just in Time Manufacturing, the consequences of having a machine down include financial penalties, lost revenue, and the threat of losing a contract.

You might have a press down and only have 24 hours to get it up and running again. Or you face the danger of shutting down a production line at Ford, GM or Chrysler where fines of thousands of dollars per minute are the norm.

You can try to change the tool and manufacture the parts in a different press, but first you need to ensure the job you bump doesn't have its own consequences. Different presses have different burden rates so the company's profit margin is directly impacted by your decision.

With decisions like this you would likely engage with various levels of plant management to shoulder the burden. Together you will decide on a strategy moving forward.

Let's say that the crisis is averted and all is well, but you need to re-stock supplies that you depleted with the last maintenance project.

You go to your desk and manually write out purchase orders, one per vendor.

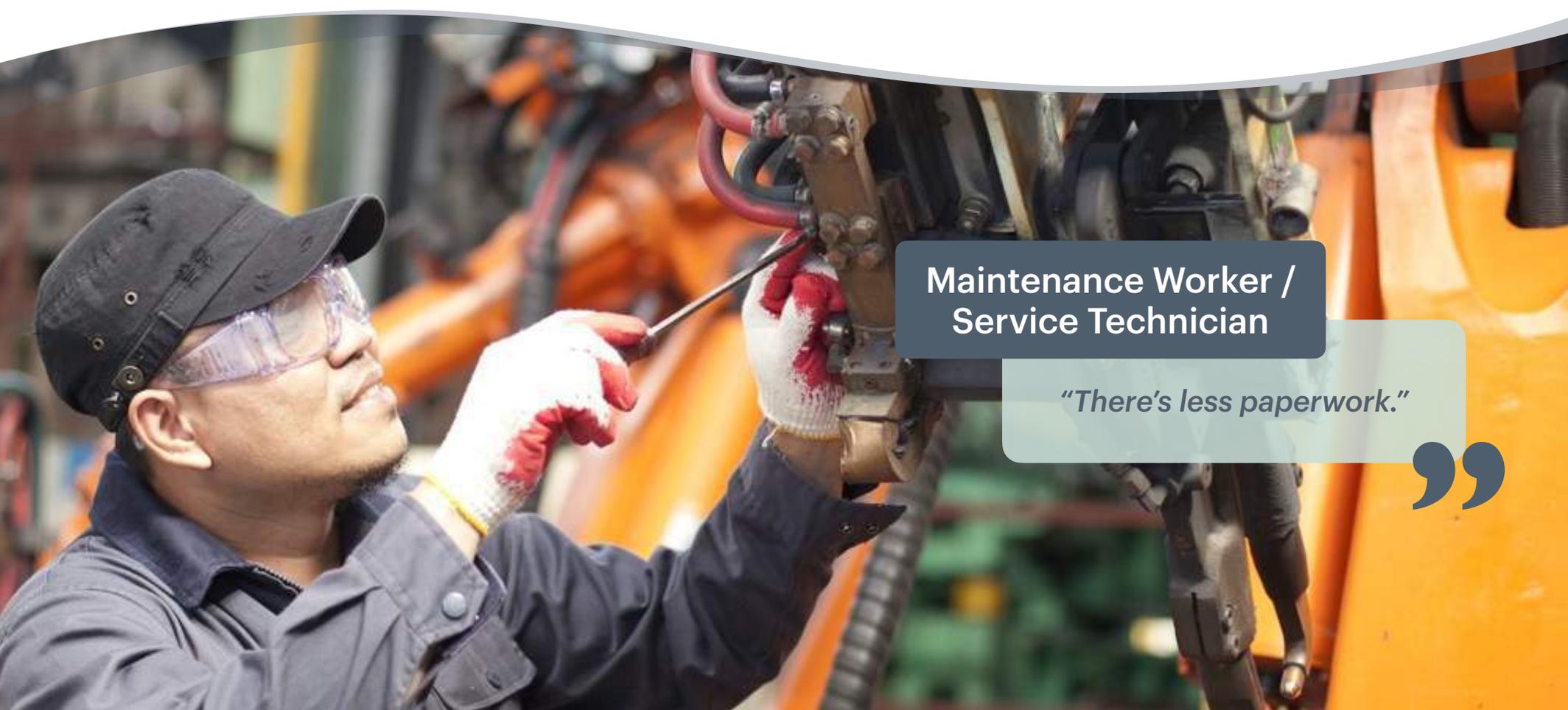
These are actually purchase orders, not purchase requisitions.

They are on carbon copy forms that need to be physically signed off by your approvers.

You have a file of all your carbon copies and you can look back to see what you have ordered in the past, something you do manually. The POs require you to write the entire GL account string on the form so that it can be used by AP when they post the invoice.

You then hand these POs to your managers (and their managers) to get signatures based on the dollar amounts they can approve.

There are no checks in place to ensure that you have provided all the required authorized signatures.



Maintenance Worker / Service Technician

*"There's less paperwork."*





## Maintenance Worker / Service Technician (cont.)

Once that is complete, you keep your copy of the PO, send one copy to AP, give one to the plant administrator and send one to the vendor.

Occasionally you may convey a PO number to a vendor with the intention of completing the paperwork, but something distracts you and you neglect to finish it. In a day or two, you use that same purchase order form, forgetting that you gave the PO number out to the other vendor.

You fill out the PO for a different vendor for a different item or service. Now when these 2 invoices come in, AP has no way of knowing what happened, and an investigation starts. This is waiting to take up your time in the near future – but for now all is well again.

### AFTER

You have less paperwork and more time for maintenance. Palette retains the purchase history and tracks PO numbers, eliminating any confusion around duplicated documents.

You can use an old requisition to create a new one, making repeat orders simple to manage.

You don't have to know the chart of accounts because the proper GL accounts are programmed in.

**“The system takes care of managing approvers, and there is a drag and drop workflow if you need to reroute an item.”**

You stop getting calls from AP with vendor issues because of the visibility they have into your purchases.

You are relieved from many tasks around accounting and finance – which was really not part of your job description in the first place.

### Maintenance Worker / Service Technician

*“I'm no longer chasing people for signatures.”*



### Sales

**Your role is to work closely with existing customers and break new ground. In the automotive industry, you must remain competitive. A new deal typically consists of at least 4 years of revenue based on the model of the automobile that the part is for, as well as residual sales for service parts.**

The Big Three demand that your company reduces its costs over the term of the contract. This is called a Long Term Agreement (LTA). This means the manufacturer will find ways to reduce the cost to manufacture the part for each year of the LTA, reducing the cost of the part to the auto company.

As an example, your company wins the contract to produce a cowl panel for a new model vehicle. The first year it will sell the part to GM for \$150 per part. The second year it will sell the same part for \$135, and so on, for the term of the agreement.

The performance on delivering what the company has committed to in the LTA includes quality, deliveries, and other factors. The better the company performs, the more parts contracts it is awarded. So it's important to keep your eye on these things to understand your company's position with clients.

The one process that touches AP and finance is your expense reporting. You have to maintain a record of your expenses and what each expense relates to. The entire process is usually done in a spreadsheet.

You have no visibility as to where the report is once you deliver it to your manager. Did he turn it in? Is it under review? Has it been rejected? These are things that require you to start writing a chain of emails, starting with AP. Did they receive the expense report? If not, where was it last seen?

On your approvers end, they need to have the ability to look at past expense reports on occasion to ensure that the same expense hasn't been used multiple times.

### AFTER

*"It's a relief to have corporate policies and procedures programmed in – because that means I'm following them!"*

You can photograph or scan all of your receipts into the Palette workflow.

You can import credit card transactions. This assists AP with processing the credit card statement when it arrives.

All the roles involved in the transaction can see past reports along with approval and payment dates.

Paperwork gets minimized. Expense types and GL codes are already programmed into the solution.

### Sales

*"I have the entire transaction chain linked together."*





## AP Staff

**Accounts payable is the hub of all transactions. If an organization still has a commitment to paper processes, the job of the AP clerk tends to revolve around maintaining multiple files (and multiple stacks) of paper.**

### → *Indirect Materials*

Indirect material invoices, purchase orders (POs) and goods receipts each have their own set of file folders. You manually go through these 3 files in alphabetical order to locate POs and shipping receipts for the invoices you have. You review “stranded” POs and goods receipts to find out why they haven’t been invoiced, or if they were paid without the PO and shipping receipt.

In most organizations, matching usually takes about 15 minutes of file shuffling and amount-checking for each and every invoice.

Once you have finished matching, you go into your email program and start following up on emails you have sent to employees and vendors.

You scan in new invoice activity that has to be investigated. Once you follow up on the emails that you have already initiated above, you now start new email threads about exception invoices.

To do this, you scan the invoice in order to attach it to an email and start another conversation you will follow up on. The follow-up could be reminding the email recipient that they need to respond, or it could be looking up a past response to print in order to attach that response to the invoice packet for audit purposes.

You manually key in invoice information to the ERP when you have a 3 way match, or an email that you have printed that provided the authorization to post the invoice into the ERP.

You then turn to another set of paper files – called Posted Not Paid. This is where you place the invoices that have been keyed into the ERP and are now waiting for payment to be made. Once the payment is made, you file them in their final location as a payment batch, or attach them to the check.

### → *Direct Materials*

Now you shift your focus to the direct materials side. You have a different invoice file for all of your direct material invoices. They will not be matched to a hard copy PO or goods receipt because they have all been received into inventory. You have to match these manually.



AP Staff

*“It’s easier to delegate tasks.”*





## AP Staff

You use a Received Not Invoiced (RNI) report, crossing off lines as you match them. These invoices must be matched in the ERP at the line level, matching on both their tiered pricing and delivered quantities.

The best method is to make the first pass and match as many invoices as possible, enter them into the ERP, and rerun the RNI report. The RNI report will be updated with only the remaining unmatched receipt lines.

You do this until all that is left are mismatched invoices. You scan the mismatched invoices and email them to either employees within the company or to vendors to help determine what the issue is.

Once you have entered these now resolved and matched invoices into the ERP, they are filed with the Posted Not Paid indirect material invoices.

Each day you start the process over again. Some days are entirely dedicated to invoice investigation and others are more focused on manual data entry.

### **Compliance Issues**

Coworkers will do things like use a blacklisted company. There is no procedure in place to stop users from purchasing from vendors that were not on the approved vendor's list.

This means that the first place the transaction for the blacklisted vendor becomes visible is in AP during the approval process – where it is too late. The vendor has either sent the goods or provided the service, and the invoice has been sent to AP. It's too late to correct the situation and use an approved vendor.

## AFTER

**“There is no data entry – or paper cuts – because both paper and emailed invoices have been digitized by the system.”**

Palette intuitively recognizes who the invoice is from and knows which data fields are required. Invoices are transformed into data and ready for the Palette automated workflow as well as payment in the ERP.

### **Bottlenecks are visible**

The status of any invoice is visible in a shared central dashboard. One large source of frustration is resolved, because if someone is not moving on an exception, you can have the system automatically move the invoice to a manager, or you can use a drag and drop workflow to send it to someone on their behalf.

### **Compliance rules are built in**

You don't have to keep a binder full of compliance rules. Approved vendors are the only vendors that users can use to purchase goods and services. Blacklisted vendors are simply not available.

### **Fewer calls from vendors**

Vendors can check on their payments themselves so they are not calling you to ask where their checks are, or what the status of their payment is.

AP Staff



*“We can do more high value work.”*



**AFTER**

(cont'd)

The vendor can respond to your comments directly, and can also submit invoices and credit memos directly to your system for routing and approval.

***Time-consuming PO matching is automated***

Palette takes care of matching the invoice, PO and goods receipt. This process happens as soon as the invoice enters the system. Palette sends the matched data to the ERP for payment.

***Exceptions are flagged for you to investigate***

You can either automate the workflow for the types of exceptions or use a “drag and drop” workflow to send the exception to the proper approver(s).

Palette tracks all of the communications about the invoice, including messages between the vendors and staff.

“When I send the approver the exception packet to examine, it contains the invoice, purchase order, goods receipt, and any communication with vendors.”

***Audits are less stressful***

Palette replaces all the file cabinets you relied on during vendor inquiries and audits, providing a searchable archive and record of every transaction.

A step-by-step documented history of invoice transactions, including communications between internal staff and suppliers with time and date stamps, provides the basis of objectivity for inquiries and investigations.

***Less digging***

You don't have to go digging for entries in the GL, go to the ERP to see payment information, or deal with spreadsheets.

All of the AP staff are empowered because we have the opportunity to identify other areas that can be streamlined.

**AP Staff**

“I can see bottlenecks and address them”





## Essential Roles

**The following roles provide necessary information. Their day to day function is not changed with the implementation of Palette, but Palette uses the data that is provided by their roles.**

This data is critical in matching invoices down to the line level. Without this data, the process for AP would remain manual.

### ➔ *Purchasing Manager*

You are responsible for negotiating the best possible price for the direct material that the company uses at all its locations. They cut a blanket PO and move on.

The blanket PO has no final dollar amount or quantity, but rather a “piece price”. In cases where there is tiered pricing, those tiers are listed as text in the body of the PO.

You don’t order the material, but sets the stage for the ordering to begin.

Your vendors provide indirect material with discounted pricing based on payment terms. Purchasing has no way to know if the vendor is invoicing the agreed upon price unless AP flags the invoice.

The purchasing department isn’t involved with 90% of indirect material purchasing – and yet they are responsible for creating and ensuring that the organization follows the appropriate procedures for purchasing.

As a member of the purchasing department, you are responsible for handling all service contracts.

### AFTER

**“Palette gives me visibility into the company’s purchasing habits and history, which is information I can use to drive savings.”**

You’re part of the approval chain for any scenario where purchasing takes place – something that may have not happened before.

Palette lets Purchasing perform audits on vendor performance about whether they are invoicing for the negotiated price, or if the vendor is shipping the quantities requested.

Palette assists with energy use audits in order to claim energy rebates – without relying on another department to provide the historical information.



### Purchasing Manager

*“I feel empowered with the information to do my job better.”*





## Essential Roles (cont'd)

### ➔ *Materials Manager*

The Materials Manager plays a key role in the manufacturing process by ensuring that jobs are run on schedule. All the necessary materials and components for each scheduled job have to have sufficient inventory levels.

The role works hand in hand with Purchasing because the purchasing department negotiates with vendors to get the best pricing. That includes tiered pricing based on volumes.

You know where the best price breaks are and you order material accordingly. You take into consideration the cost to keep the material on hand in inventory as well as the frequency of manufacturing the parts that consume that material.

Your final part of any transaction should be to place the order according to all of these pieces of information. If the vendor ships quantities other than what you ordered, the company could pay a higher price because the information from the order is not available to anyone in Accounts Payable.

To AP, the invoice could look perfectly 'normal' because they do not know that you ordered 1,000 pieces to get the price break – yet the vendor shipped 2 shipments of 500 and billed them at a higher piece price.

There is only one department between you and the accounting department, and that is shipping/receiving.

### ➔ *Shipping and Receiving Clerk*

Your role is to record direct material as it is brought in to the plant. You are the only role that stands between the materials department and an invoice being paid correctly.

When you are entering the receipt, you must enter it against the correct release. This is the only way for AP to know what the amount of the invoice should be and ensures that the vendor is invoicing according to the price breaks in their contract.



### Material Manager

*"Visibility gives me an edge."*



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