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A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO

Managing Manual Invoice Submissions



INTRODUCTION:

The Growing Complexity of Invoice Submissions

For Many Suppliers Today, The Process Of Submitting An Invoice Is Not As Straightforward As Sending An Email With A Pdf Document Or A Physical Hardcopy. In Today's Scenario, Where Buyer-Driven Platforms Such As Ariba Have Become Increasingly Popular, The Process Of Invoicing Is More Structured And Standardized.

While on the surface, this may be beneficial in many ways, such as ensuring consistency and compliance, it is not as easy a process for the supplier. In today's scenario, where many suppliers are still using manual methods of invoicing, each invoice must be properly validated. There are specific fields that must be filled in precisely. Documents must be attached properly. In many cases, even minor issues such as mismatch in purchase order (PO) may result in rejection.



This creates a cycle many suppliers are already familiar with:

- Invoices get rejected due to minor errors
- Teams spend time correcting and resubmitting
- Approval timelines get pushed further out
- Payment cycles are delayed

Over time, these repeated disruptions don't just affect operations. They directly impact cash flow, increasing Days Sales Outstanding (DSO) and creating unnecessary financial pressure.

The core issue here isn't just the complexity of buyer systems. It's the lack of a structured approach to managing manual invoice submissions. When handled without clear processes, defined ownership, and validation checks, invoice submission becomes a reactive task instead of a controlled workflow. And that's where problems begin to scale.

The Operational Challenges Suppliers Face

Handling invoice submissions manually may work when volumes are low, and processes are simple. Teams can manage entries, track submissions, and fix errors without much strain. However, as invoice volumes grow, the workload increases significantly. Repetitive data entry, validation checks, and portal navigation begin to consume more time. At the same time, different buyers introduce varying requirements, making the process more complex. Switching between formats, rules, and documentation standards increases the risk of errors. Without a structured approach, teams face delays, backlogs, and reduced accuracy, turning what was once manageable into a demanding and time-sensitive operational challenge.

Let's look at the most common challenges suppliers face.

Invoice Rejection Cycles

Manual data entry is inherently prone to errors. Whether it's a typo in the invoice number, incorrect PO mapping, or missing documentation, even small mistakes can lead to rejection.

What makes this worse is the feedback loop. Rejected invoices must be reviewed, corrected, and resubmitted. This not only consumes time but also creates delays that compound over multiple invoices. In many cases, teams end up spending more time fixing errors than getting invoices right the first time.

Submission Backlogs

Invoice submission is often not the only responsibility of finance or operations teams. It competes with tasks like collections, reconciliation, reporting, and compliance. As a result, invoices can sit in internal queues before they are even uploaded to the buyer portal.

This delay is critical. Even if the invoice itself is accurate, late submission directly pushes back the approval and payment timeline.

Multiple Buyer Requirements

Each buyer may have their own set of rules:

- Different mandatory fields
- Unique PO structures
- Specific document requirements
- Distinct validation logic

For suppliers working with multiple buyers, this creates a fragmented process. Teams must constantly switch contexts and adapt to different submission standards. Without proper documentation and process control, this increases the likelihood of errors.

Limited Internal Bandwidth

Most finance teams are not designed to function as dedicated invoice submission units.

They are already responsible for:

- Managing receivables
- Tracking payments
- Handling disputes
- Preparing reports

Adding manual portal submissions to this workload stretches resources thin. Over time, this leads to inconsistencies, missed timelines, and reduced attention to detail.

Why This Becomes a Problem at Scale

Individually, these challenges may seem manageable. But when combined and multiplied across hundreds or thousands of invoices, they create a significant operational burden. Manual invoice submission becomes less about execution and more about firefighting.

Business Impact of Inefficient Invoice Processing

Operational inefficiencies don't stay confined to internal workflows. They eventually slow measurable business outcomes.

Here's how.

Delayed Invoice Approvals

Each failed or delayed submission extends the approval cycle further out. Since most buyer systems start processing after a successful submission, any delays at this point will have a ripple effect.

Higher DSO and Slower Receivables

When approvals are delayed, payments are delayed. This directly increases DSO, tying up working capital that could otherwise be used for business growth, operations, or investments.

Increased Administrative Workload

Manual corrections, resubmissions, and follow-ups add to the workload.

Teams spend time on:

- Identifying errors
- Communicating with internal stakeholders
- Tracking submission status
- Following up with buyers

This reduces overall productivity and diverts focus from higher-value tasks.

Frequent Follow-Ups with Buyers

Lack of visibility into invoice status often leads to repeated follow-ups.

Teams may not know:

- Whether an invoice was successfully submitted
- If it is under review
- If it has been rejected or approved

This uncertainty results in unnecessary communication, adding friction to supplier-buyer relationships.

Pressure During Month-End Cycles

Months-end periods are already challenging for finance teams. When there are backlogs in invoices, it becomes even tougher. This forces teams to rush the submissions, which in turn leads to increased errors and rejections.

Reduced Visibility into Invoice Status

Without structured tracking, it becomes difficult to answer basic questions:

- Which invoices are pending submissions?
- Which ones were rejected?
- What is the current approval status?

This lack of visibility limits decision-making and makes forecasting less reliable.

A Process Problem, Not Just a Payment Problem

It's important to recognize that these issues are often not caused by buyer payment policies. In many cases, the delays originate from gaps in submission processes. Fixing the process can significantly improve outcomes without changing external dependencies.

What a Structured Manual Invoice Processing Model Looks Like

Manual invoice submission does not have to feel disorganized or difficult. With the right structure in place, the process can be brought under control. Clear workflows, consistent validation checks, and dedicated ownership help improve accuracy and ensure timely submissions. This approach reduces errors and creates better visibility into invoice status, making follow-ups easier. Over time, what once felt repetitive and error-prone can become a reliable, predictable process that supports smoother operations and faster payments.



Here's what that looks like in practice

Dedicated Manpower

One of the most important elements is ownership.

Instead of distributing invoice submission tasks across multiple team members, a dedicated team or resource handles:

- Invoice validation
- Portal submissions
- Status tracking

This ensures consistency and accountability.



Defined Processing Timelines

Timeliness is critical in invoice submission.

A structured model includes clear turnaround times, such as:

- Invoices processed within 24–48 hours of receipt
- Immediate handling of urgent submissions

This prevents backlogs and keeps the process moving.



Pre-Submission Validation

Prevention is better than correction.

Before submission, invoices go through validation checks:

- PO number accuracy
- Line-item matching
- Required fields completion
- Supporting document verification

This significantly reduces rejection rates.



Exception Handling

Not all invoices will pass validation.

A structured process includes clear steps for handling exceptions:

- Identifying issues early
- Routing them to the right stakeholders
- Resolving them before submission

This avoids unnecessary rejection cycles.



Submission Monitoring

Once submitted, invoices are tracked until approval.

This includes:

- Monitoring portal status
- Identifying rejections quickly
- Initiating corrective actions

With proper tracking, teams gain visibility and control.

Real-World Example

Consider a mid-sized supplier handling 1,000 invoices per month across three buyer portals.

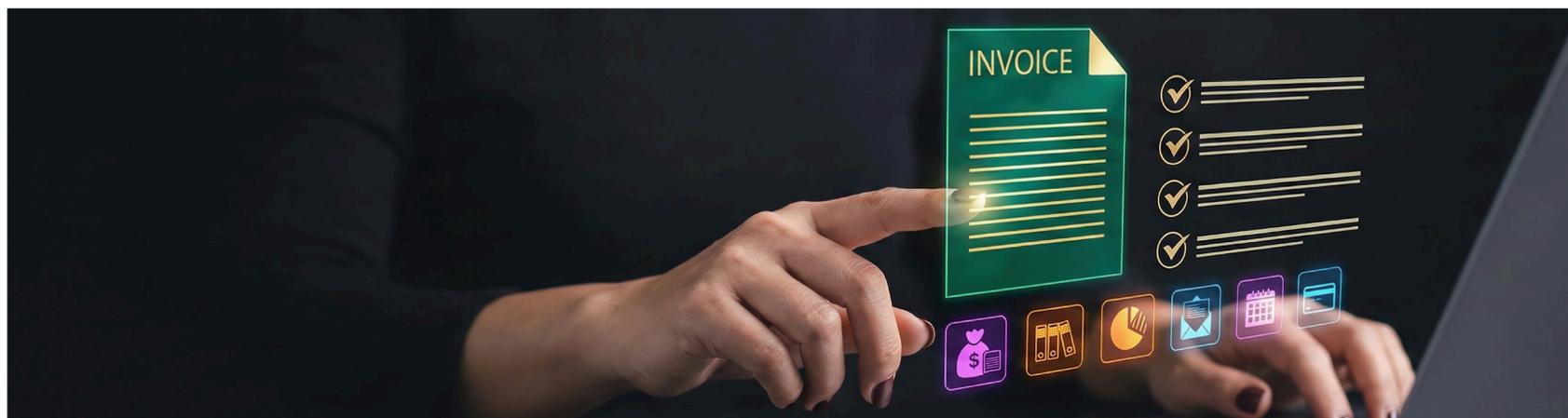
Without structure:

- 20–30% of invoices face rejection
- Submission delays average 3–5 days
- Teams spend significant time on corrections

With a structured model:

- Rejections drop significantly
- Submission timelines improve
- Teams focus more on resolution than rework

The difference is not technology. It's a process discipline.



When Suppliers Should Consider External Support

While some suppliers can manage invoice submissions internally, there are clear signs that the current setup may not be sustainable. *Here are a few indicators.*

Increasing Invoice Volumes

As the business grows, invoice volumes increase steadily. A process that works well for 100 invoices may not be effective for 1,000. Higher volumes demand better coordination, faster processing, and stronger validation. Without scaling the approach, teams may face delays, errors, and growing operational pressure over time.

Growing Submission Backlogs

Backlogs often indicate that the team is struggling to keep up with growing demand. As invoices accumulate, submission timelines get delayed, increasing pressure on teams and raising the risk of errors, missed deadlines, and slower overall processing efficiency.

Frequent Rejections

If invoice rejection rates stay high despite ongoing internal efforts, it usually indicates underlying process gaps. This could include inconsistent validation, unclear ownership, or lack of standardized workflows. Without addressing these root issues, errors continue to repeat, leading to frequent rejections, delays in approvals, and increased workload for teams handling corrections.

Portal Usage for Only a Few Buyers

In some cases, suppliers use portals for only a subset of buyers. Investing heavily in internal systems or automation may not be practical.

Multiple Buyer Portals to Manage

Managing multiple buyer portals adds significant complexity to the invoice submission process. Each platform has its own rules, formats, and validation requirements, which demand specific knowledge. Without proper understanding, teams may face errors, delays, and increased effort in handling submissions accurately.

Limited Internal Capacity

When teams are overburdened with multiple responsibilities, both quality and timeliness begin to decline. Important details may be overlooked, errors become more frequent, and submission deadlines are missed, leading to delays in processing and increased pressure on already stretched resources.

External Support as an Operational Extension

This is where outsourced manual invoice processing becomes relevant. It's not about replacing systems or implementing complex integrations. Instead, it acts as an extension of your operations:

- Dedicated teams handle submissions
- Processes are standardized
- Validation and tracking are built into the workflow

This allows internal teams to focus on core financial activities while ensuring invoice submissions are handled efficiently.

Conclusion

Manual invoice submission may seem like a routine task, but in reality, it plays a critical role in determining how quickly a business gets paid. When the process becomes repetitive, rule-driven, and high-volume, relying on unstructured workflows leads to errors, delays, and inefficiencies.

On the other hand, a structured approach built on clear processes, dedicated ownership, and disciplined execution can transform outcomes.

It improves:

- Accuracy
- Submission timelines
- Visibility
- Payment predictability

For suppliers dealing with growing volumes, multiple buyer requirements, and increasing operational pressure, managed invoice submission support offers a practical way forward. Instead of struggling with rejections and delays, businesses can bring consistency and control into their invoicing process.

If your team is constantly fixing the same errors, dealing with growing backlogs, or waiting longer to get paid, it's a clear sign something needs to change. Instead of pushing through the same cycle, it might be worth rethinking how invoice submissions are handled. Bringing in a more structured, well-managed approach can help reduce friction, improve consistency, and create a smoother path to faster payments and better financial control.



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