

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE AUTOMATION  
CASE STUDY



# Digital Transformation via AP Automation 'cultivates' success for Ruralco

**76%**

Staff reduction, now used  
elsewhere in the business



**ROI**

For AP Automation,  
just 1 Year



**100%**

Integration with Microsoft  
Dynamics Great Plains



Process  
Automation

Ruralco provides farmers with all their farming needs, including general farm supplies, seed, fertiliser, fuel and energy. With the co-op's annual revenue around \$250 million, time-consuming manual accounts payable processes just weren't cutting it. With the introduction of Esker Accounts Payable Automation, the company has revolutionised this key process and achieved all this with an ROI of just 1 year.

## CHALLENGE

Upon joining Ruralco, group CFO Oliver O'Neill found a situation which, from an accounting perspective, was tedious and time consuming. "We have 16,000 SKUs. We sell everything from pipe fittings to bulk grain and ship from Canterbury all over New Zealand. We even sell products that we don't stock [drop shipping]. In addition to the standard agricultural co-op retailing, we also have a large energy business with all the requirements for irrigation in mid-Canterbury and handle all the billing and invoicing related to that. We also have a seed business, and have charge cards which accumulate invoices that are sent in a single statement to customers at the end of the month."

With tens of thousands of invoices processed per month, Ruralco also makes payments every day.

Further complicating the company's Accounts Payable (AP) environment is that it has different terms of freight with various suppliers, and must manage inventory across a multitude of SKUs, with monthly billings of over \$20 million.

### TOO MUCH PAPER

25 people were employed to handle the vast scope of their administrative and financial processes and Oliver decided a whole new approach was needed to cope with their antiquated procedures and associated volume of transactions.



IT WAS DIFFICULT TO MANAGE



**WE HAD NO OVERVIEW OF THE CYCLE; THERE WERE PAPER INVOICES ALL OVER THE PLACE — WE RECEIVED 90 PERCENT OF THEM BY EMAIL AND TYPED THEM INTO THE ERP SYSTEM - THERE WERE CONSTANT ISSUES WITH INACCURATE POS FROM OUTDATED PRICE LISTS. WHEN MONTH-END CAME, IT WAS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE TO GET EVERYTHING CLOSED, WITH APPROVERS OUT OF THE OFFICE, PAPERS STACKED HERE AND THERE; TO GET AN IDEA, WE LITERALLY NEEDED A FORKLIFT TO FIND INVOICES IF WE NEEDED THEM A YEAR AFTER THE FACT.**

**OLIVER O'NEILL  
GROUP CFO  
RURALCO**

## OUR FOCUS

**WORKFLOW**  
TEDIOUS AND TIME-CONSUMING  
ACCOUNTS PROCESSES  
HOLDING RURALCO BACK



**INTEGRATION**  
HAD TO WORK SEAMLESSLY  
WITH MICROSOFT DYNAMICS  
GREAT PLAINS ERP

**CUSTOMISATION**  
NEEDED A NEW SOLUTION  
THAT COULD WORK WITH THEIR  
DROP-SHIPPING OPERATIONS



**IT WASN'T LIKE OTHER IT COMPANIES WHERE YOU GET A NASTY SURPRISE WITH THE PRICING; THEY WERE CLEAR AND UPFRONT. AND IN TERMS OF SUPPORT AND A CUSTOMISATION TO HANDLE DROP SHIPPING, IT'S BEEN NOTHING SHORT OF EXCELLENT**

**ESKER WAS MILES BETTER THAN THE COMPETITION. AND IT WAS EASY TO SET UP, WITH A ONE-WEEK ON-SITE TRAINING. AND IT IS SO EASY TO USE, A CHILD COULD GO IN THERE, GET STARTED AND WITHIN AN HOUR HAVE IT UP AND RUNNING AND PROCESSING INVOICES. I'M NOT KIDDING**



## SOLUTION

A commitment to make a change to a situation which was clearly less than optimal came directly from the company's raison d'être, said O'Neill. "We are a company that thinks differently and leverages technology to lower input costs to increase margins for our members," he noted.

Having learned about Esker Accounts Payable automation software from an associate, Ruralco requested a demonstration from FUJIFILM Process Automation, while also evaluating other systems available on the open market.

"It wasn't like other IT companies where you get a nasty surprise with the pricing; they were clear and upfront. And in terms of support

and a customisation to handle drop shipping, it's been nothing short of excellent."

### MILES BETTER

Esker's Accounts Payable automation software allows businesses to eliminate the manual pains of traditional AP invoice processing with intelligent capture, touchless processing and electronic workflow capabilities.

And it quickly won over O'Neill: "Esker was miles better than the competition. And it was easy to set up, with a one-week on-site training. And it is so easy to use, a child could go in there, get started and within an hour have it up and running and processing invoices. I'm not kidding."





**IT'S THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG AND THERE'S A LOT MORE TO COME. THE SUCCESS OF THIS PROJECT MEANS WE'RE VERY OPEN TO FURTHER TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT**

## CUSTOMISATION IS OUR MIDDLE NAME



**READY FOR DROPSHIPPING THANKS TO ESKER'S EASY CUSTOMISATION**

## RESULTS

With Esker, explains O'Neill, Ruralco has a full overview of where invoices are at all times, with a dashboard view of how many invoices are being processed per person per day.

Dynamic real-time reporting shows where invoices are in the process and how long it is taking an approver to action an invoice. Approvers use the mobile app to view their invoice queue and approve invoices, significantly accelerating processing. Additionally, all the invoices are stored in the cloud for 7 years.

Since implementing the cloud software in April this year, O'Neill says there has been zero downtime. "It just works. It has an app, it has delegation of authority, it has complete visibility. I can log-in with my phone and find any invoice, see where it is in the process, and even approve it, in seconds."

### GROWTH WITH FUJIFILM

He has praise for FUJIFILM, which handled the implementation and support. "It wasn't like other IT companies where you get a nasty

surprise with the pricing; they were clear and upfront. And in terms of support and a customisation to handle drop shipping, it's been nothing short of excellent."

Integration with the company's ERP system – in this case, Microsoft Dynamics Great Plains – presented little in the way of a challenge. "And we're the first in New Zealand to integrate with GP. It wasn't hard."

From 25 staff members in the finance department, Ruralco is now down to just 6 individuals, 'two and a half' of whom are focused on Accounts Payable. "The system just works. When done manually, we had people drowning in paper. Now, we're not fighting fires the whole time, but doing value-added tasks which benefit the business, while AP largely handles itself."

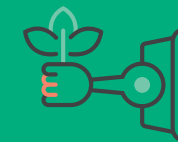
With an ROI of just 12 months there's also one final benefit which has flowed from the introduction of intelligent automation to the AP process: fertile ground now exists for the further introduction of smart technology.

## FARMING FOR GROWTH



**76% DECREASE IN STAFF USED FOR AP PROCESS**

**ROI OF 1 YR MAKES IT 100% WORTHWHILE**



**100% INTEGRATION WITH MICROSOFT ERP**



**THE INVOICES ARE SENT BY SUPPLIERS TO A DEDICATED AP ADDRESS WHICH AUTOMATICALLY SENDS THEM INTO ESKER. WITH APPROVED VENDORS, THERE'S STRAIGHT-THROUGH PROCESSING AND PAYMENT HAPPENS AUTOMATICALLY. AND BEST OF ALL, WE LITERALLY NO LONGER HAVE A SINGLE PIECE OF PAPER COMING THROUGH THE FINANCE TEAM**

# Need expert advice on Purchasing & Accounts Payable Automation?

## Get in touch today to start your own Digital Transformation

### ABOUT FUJIFILM PROCESS AUTOMATION

FUJIFILM Process Automation specialise in true digital transformation for your business. Our people are experts who listen, understand, consider what's possible, then anchor your digital transformation around the processes and goals that exist within your business.

Pain points in your finance department, repetitive manual tasks, lack of process or finance visibility, paperwork that slows down employees and destroys customer experience are the kind of things we are on a mission to stamp out.

We have a solid track record, and our team's knowledge and experience have enabled many New Zealand businesses to gain a competitive edge. Our customers' success is what sets us apart.

From Accounts Payable to Document Management, Smart Forms to Digital Signatures, we have the tools, knowledge and drive to help your business succeed in this ever changing digital world. Get Automated today.

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