FUJIFILM | Process Automation

codeblue IT services by FUJIFILM

Hitting paws on the paperwork for Animates

ANIMATES

Success Story
Animates

Industry
Pet specialty retail

Paperwork eliminated

Digitised AP, procurement and expenses workflows replace scanning, stamping and couriering invoices.

Scale without headcount

Business has almost doubled since 2015 – without needing a bigger Accounts payable team.

Outsourced support services

CodeBlue provides IT support to Animates vet clinics and stores, so the internal IT team can focus on other work.

Background

Animates is New Zealand's largest pet supply and service retailer, the go-to for everything from pet food and toys to vet and grooming services. With 47 retail and 15 vet sites nationwide, it covers New Zealand, with a focus on making sure pets and pet parents find happiness together.

In 2015, Animates' growth was being challenged by paper. As opportunities expanded, the company needed an Accounts Payable (AP), procurement and expenses system that would expand too.

As systems became more complex, it also needed a way to support its 60+ stores and vet clinics with tech issues, without putting more pressure on its lean internal IT team.

And that's where Fujifilm Process Automation and CodeBlue came in.

Chasing tails with paper-based systems

Ten years ago, the Animates team was using a fully paper system to manage accounts payable, procurement and expense workflows. When Chief Financial Officer Vicky King joined the company, she saw immediately that the process was far too resource-heavy.

"Invoices would turn up at stores, where they'd be bunched up and put on a courier or scanned

and sent to us at the support office. We would print it, stamp it, scan it, send it back to the stores to code it and sign it. They'd then have to scan it again and send it back. Then we'd print it again and then key it in. It was an absolutely horrible way to work."

Flying blind

The labour-intensive paper processing left huge room for error and meant the Animates team had little visibility or transparency over where invoices were in the AP workflow. Understandably, this had serious implications for the business. Staff conflicts over lost paperwork and payment delays weren't uncommon.

"If a file goes missing, you've got no trace of where it went. There's an increased risk that suppliers won't get paid on time, and it does start to impact your relationships."

Without a purchase order system, management also had no visibility or control over what was being spent and where.

"It means you're flying blind a little bit."

Esker and Fujifilm Process Automation get Animates' AP purring

With support from Fujifilm Process Automation, Animates chose Esker's cloud-based AP automation to streamline its non-stock invoice processing.

The goal: set the business up for growth by reducing errors and paperwork. While other systems claimed to do that, Vicky says Esker was the standout for its ease of use.

"We don't want to make life harder for our team. We don't want to give them three days of training," she explains. "It needed to be logical. With Esker, you open it up, and there's a big green button that says 'Approve.' That was a big thing for me."

Even something as simple as replacing petty cash with a credit-card expense management process was nothing short of game-changing.

"With everything managed through Esker, it's just more transparent."

Easy-fetch files

Lost files were also a thing of the past – digital archives replaced physical storage for fast, searchable access.

"Before Esker, if we needed a copy of an invoice, we would go down into the basement to try and find the right box and the right day and the right supplier," says Vicky.

With Esker and Fujifilm Process Automation, Animates has fundamentally changed the way the finance team operates – and set up the company for future growth with systems and processes that scale easily.

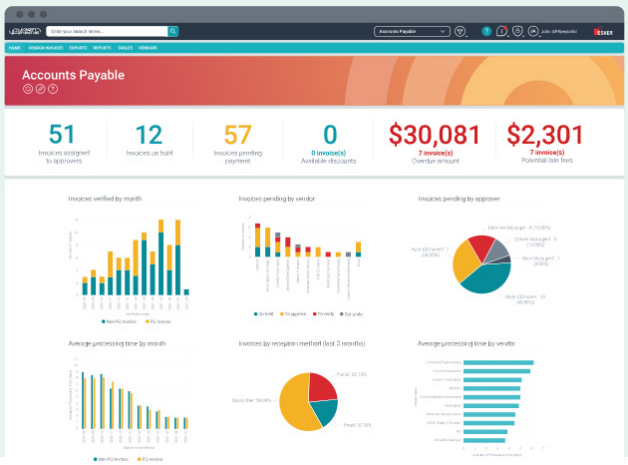
Growing the business, not the headcount

Replacing the long-winded paper trail, Esker's digital workflows now route documents directly to the right approver. Managers – whether in-store or on the road – are notified via mobile when invoices need attention.

"Once the store approves it, it goes straight through," says Vicky. "That's brought processing time down to as little as two days."

It also built in much-needed scalability – the business has almost doubled since 2015, but the team hasn't.

"We even added a group of vet clinics since then, and we've still only got one main person managing our operating expenses and capital expenditure."



LINE HEAVY INVOICES PROCESSED IN

SECONDS

Stronger documentation, **fewer** escalations, **faster** fixes

Help desk keeps staff supported

That growth increased the company's support needs, too. Rather than expand their IT team of eight, they leaned on CodeBlue.

"With just a lean team, managing 62 sites wasn't feasible," explains Phillip Christopher, General Manager of the Animates IT team. "That's where CodeBlue stepped in to provide support."

When a staff member calls or emails with a support issue, the CodeBlue team triages the ticket, resolves it, or escalates to Animates' internal IT team if needed.

As Phillip explains, Animates has a high number of staff sharing devices in both retail stores and vet clinics. This leads to frequent login and access issues, along with problems caused by staff who aren't familiar with evolving systems.

"We're moving at a phenomenal pace, so we need that support to look after our store teams and clinic teams."

"And without CodeBlue, we wouldn't be able to do what we're good at, and that's delivering new platforms to provide efficiency to the rest of the business."

Better documentation, better service

2025 saw the business moving from a legacy CRM system to Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central, a cloud-based ERP platform that combines finance, sales and operations. This required a huge effort from the IT team – supported by CodeBlue.

Upgraded documentation also minimised the tickets that CodeBlue had to escalate to the Animates IT team.

"We were spending numerous hours, days, weeks dealing with stuff the service desk could have dealt with," says Phillip.

After an intensive, months-long process working through a service improvement plan (SIP), Animates now has a strong knowledge base for IT issues. Help desk workers can search through extensive documents and workflows to answer staff questions, reducing the number of escalations to the Animates IT team.

Visibility and oversight

Esker has also improved efficiency, giving the team much-needed oversight with access to reporting on outstanding invoices.

"That really helps with accruals," adds Vicky. "The credit card module also gives us much more visibility than we ever had with petty cash."

Easy access to reporting and viewing invoices online has made parts of the audit process much simpler.

"Can you imagine? We had to keep 12 months of invoices in the office until after the audit. Now you just call it up on screen."

New features keep adding value

A new Esker feature has increased the value Animates gets from the software. It can now pick and choose which supplier invoices get auto-approved and which need more scrutiny.

"You have the flexibility in the system to allow you to automate where you can and keep the oversight where you need it."

A decade and counting

The longstanding relationships between Fujifilm Business Innovation, CodeBlue and Animates have proved invaluable. Quarterly reviews with the Fujifilm Process Automation team help identify opportunities to maximise the value Animates gets from the software, while CodeBlue has monthly meetings to identify support issues and documentation gaps.

"They don't just leave you to it. They come to us with ideas to reduce errors and cut costs," says Vicky.

Ten years on, what started as a fix for paperwork and support calls has become a system set up for sustainability, scale and smoother operations – helping Animates focus on what really matters: helping pets (and their people) thrive.

Get in touch with the team today.

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