How Paperless ERP in the Cloud Can Brighten Accounting Processes

Cloud-based ERP Enables Productivity, Reduces Costs and Boosts Revenues
The cloud is rumbling through industries and supply chains with an ever more dominating presence and an amazing ability to cut costs, increase productivity and boost revenues, all at the same time. Businesses covered by the cloud are shifting their IT hardware, software and networks from their own server rooms to hosted online data centers, where they subscribe to the IT services they need rather than building and maintaining an IT infrastructure on their own premises.

Along with office tools, personal services and entertainment venues, ERP platforms have risen to the cloud as well. Today, businesses have the option of situating all or part of their ERP technology in cloud-based datacenters, which can offer an array of advantages over home-grown technology, including:

- **Cost savings on technology.** Instead of licensing software for each machine in the company, a business can simply subscribe to cloud-based ERP for a low monthly fee per user. Additionally, IT staff suddenly is freed up from the burden of maintaining and upgrading on-premises servers and networks, routine tasks that, according to a recent Microsoft study, consumes 75 percent of IT spending worldwide. As a result, IT professionals have the time to develop applications and processes to improve efficiency and profitability.

- **Access.** Because cloud-based ERP operates via the Web, authorized employees can access it anytime from anywhere. Furthermore, the company is assured that every employee is using the same, most recent version of ERP software, because the technology is upgraded by the datacenter host as soon as new versions are released.

- **Scale.** Businesses experiencing seasonal swings or rapid growth can become bogged down in trying to deploy additional hardware and software quickly across their enterprise. The cloud makes scaling an easy matter of simply adjusting the number of user subscriptions. The cloud stretches as far as the company needs it to reach; simply add users to the subscription, and the cloud handles the back end on its own.

- **Security.** The host can handle all the administration and maintenance of applications, hardware and data. Because cloud-based datacenters serve a variety of businesses, many with the strictest of security requirements, a company can expect the cloud-based service to maintain the highest level of security protocols and systems, far greater than those that most companies could afford to install on their own.

- **Safety.** The cloud serves as an automatic back-up service for a company’s data. While data stored on premises could be destroyed in a disaster, cloud-based ERP platforms store the company’s data in a remote, secure online center, where it can be retrieved in authorized fashion from any computer to help a business get back on its feet after a crisis.

While all these benefits can help businesses run more profitably, securely and efficiently, companies will not realize the full impact of cloud-based ERP without taking one important step: removing paper from their accounting processes. Even though business transactions and accounting systems today are moving at ever accelerating broadband speeds, many businesses continue to use paper in their accounts payable and receivable processes, and soon they are likely to show the economic and competitive strains of trying to keep up with the pace, accuracy and efficiencies demanded by suppliers and customers alike. The good news is that switching to Paperless ERP with automated AP and AR capabilities has become simpler than ever with low-cost, cloud-based ERP platforms and automation software.

The latest cloud versions of such ERP platforms as Microsoft Dynamics AX, GP and SL offer deep accounting and business-management functionality and enable accounting departments to eliminate the need to work with paper invoices, purchase orders and other documents when the ERP technology is integrated with a document.
management system like MetaViewer from Metafile. In fact, cloud-based paperless AP and AR automation allows businesses to significantly improve their accounting processes while slashing their technology investment costs.

When companies move to Paperless ERP with AP/AR automation, they immediately enhance their operations in a number of ways:

- **They improve the accuracy and speed of their processes.** The right paperless document management solution will automatically convert paper invoices submitted by vendors into digital versions that can be managed easily and accurately. These solutions can also provide workflow automation to expedite approvals and processing of invoices so that paper invoices no longer sit in a manager’s inbox or get lost during inter-office delivery. Once entered into the system, every invoice can be tracked, and management gains a complete view of payments due, allowing for much more accurate financial planning.

- **Digital data in the system can be trusted.** Information is entered just once, and that same data can be accessed at any time from anywhere in the world. Everyone is working from the same version of the data, so everyone can rely on the Paperless ERP platform to furnish consistent, timely reports.

- **Operational costs drop dramatically.** A combined Dynamics/paperless document management solution saves all the people-costs of managing stacks of paper documents, allows the organization to take advantage of vendor discounts for on-time payments and can eliminate penalty fees for late payments.

- **Paperless ERP also saves time.** Some organizations may spend days sorting through invoices gathered from far-flung branches or franchisees. Others launch internal expeditions to discover on whose desk a delayed invoice has been resting without action. Even in the best-organized companies, paperwork often passes back and forth among multiple approvers before landing in the right basket. Digital, cloud-based, Paperless ERP centralizes and automates workflow to reduce the paper-trail cycles that can devour administrative time.

- **Greater confidence in projections.** With the more accurate and timely AP/AR process afforded by Paperless ERP, management can be assured they have a complete and up-to-date view of the company’s financial situation when projecting financial trends and impacts within the business.

The benefits of Paperless ERP become supercharged when a business adopts a cloud-based combination of ERP and a paperless document management solution, like MetaViewer. Paper invoices and other documentation are converted to digital form for simplified, more accurate processing. Workflow can be automated to ensure that all documentation is managed in an organized fashion across the enterprise. Access to accounting data and reports becomes an easy process for all authorized personnel, anywhere across the globe.

Another advantage of placing AP and AR data in the cloud can be found in the automatic backup that is an inherent feature of the cloud. In the event of a disaster that impacts the company—computer hacking, fire, tornado, flood—all of the organization’s accounting data remains intact and available in the cloud. Users can simply access a computer anywhere, log in and continue working.

Finally, since all the data is digital, paperwork cannot get lost, damaged or illegitimately copied. In these ways, digital data is far more secure than paper receipts or other physical documentation.

Some businesses may want to keep some of their data on their own premises simply because of the special procedures they must use to protect it and/or the need to severely limit access. ERP with an integrated paperless document management solution like MetaViewer can meet that need through a hybrid cloud solution, allowing the most sensitive data to remain in the company’s servers while other functions are managed in the cloud.
Whatever configuration you may be considering, you may wish to bear in mind these five tips to help ensure that, when you’re set to reach for the cloud, your transition goes smoothly:

1. Even if you feel you are not quite ready to consider the cloud today, you should move ahead with selecting both an ERP vendor and a document management system vendor who have cloud-computing solutions. Once you are ready later on, moving to the cloud will be much less expensive and disruptive because it will simply involve extending your current technology to cloud-based systems.

2. Don’t feel that you must move all your business-critical applications to the cloud at once. Choose a smaller project to implement and build on that success. Start perhaps with just e-mail or your invoicing process.

3. If you plan to keep your ERP solution in-house for the time being, be sure your paperless AP automation vendor can integrate its solution with your in-house system. When you are ready to adopt the cloud, the entire system should be able to move there as one integrated solution.

4. Be certain that your technology vendors have experience integrating with solutions residing in different secure databases. The chances of all your solutions residing in the same datacenter are very slim, and you don’t want these applications to become isolated clouds of their own.

5. Encourage your vendors to submit digital invoices and other documentation, rather than paper. Digital data allows franchisees and remote offices to transmit all their invoices directly to headquarters in an easily manageable fashion, rather than sending boxloads of paper documents to be scanned. Scanning paper documents into a cloud-based system is a necessary function but will consume a much larger amount of bandwidth between the office and the cloud when compared to sending digital documents.

If your business is ready to reach for the cloud—or if it wants to maximize its use of a cloud-based ERP platform—check the opportunities and savings available through Paperless ERP with Metafile at www.metaviewer.com/cloud-computing.