Ten Critical Questions To Ask Your Expense Claim Automation Solution Supplier

"Infor Expense Management reduces costs by eliminating manual, error-prone processes. It has made a tangible difference to process control in a surprisingly short period of time."

ELIZABETH RAMIREZ, ASSISTANT GROUP SYSTEMS ACCOUNTANT, THOMAS MILLER

With the variety of expense claim automation solutions available, you might be forgiven for thinking that they are all largely similar in functionality. All offer basic capabilities: For example, they all allow employees to enter details of their expenses into a claim form, which is then routed to an approving manager for authorisation. However drill beneath the surface and there are some significant differences in the functionality they offer. These differences can be critical to organisations that operate in multiple countries, in multiple divisions, or that have anything more than the very simplest "one size fits all" requirements. So what are the key questions concerning system functionality that you should ask a potential supplier?

How are different business rules, workflows, and expense types applied to different groups of users?

It is important to look at how different groups of users are identified for the purposes of applying different business rules, workflows, and expense types to the members of these groups. For example, is there a concept of User Group in the application, or do users have to be implemented in separate systems if different business rules and workflows are to be applied to them?

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How flexible are the workflow options?

Workflow is critical to productivity, so you'll want to find out if workflows are restricted in any way. For example, is the employee required to nominate their approver when first using the system, meaning that the claim will always be authorised by the same individual, irrespective of the cost centre(s) and/or project codes which the claim or line items are allocated to? A fully-functional solution will allow for flexibly, document workflows that vary according to any attribute (or combination of attributes) of both the creator and the document itself. Claims that have line items allocated to multiple cost centres or projects should be able to be sent automatically to the relevant cost-centre and project managers as well as the claimant's line manager for authorisation.

What's the lifetime cost of ownership of the system over its projected lifespan?

ROI is key, so you simply must ask questions around the total cost of ownership. Which aspects of the system can be managed via the administration tool provided with the system? If the answer isn't "Everything you might need to change," you'll need to find out what the is the cost of asking the vendor to make changes; what turnaround time they guarantee; and what other customers' experience is of this service.

How does the system handle VAT and taxes?

Most companies operate internationally to some extent, so can the system automatically calculate both domestic and non-domestic VAT? For expense line items with multiple VAT rates, how are these managed so that the correct VAT is calculated on each element of the line item? Finally, what options are available for VAT calculations in terms of calculating recoverable VAT amounts?

How does it support daily allowances (per diems)?

For what countries does the system provide proven support for daily allowances? Does the system provide support for both elapsed time and daily rate allowances? Additionally, can deductions from per diems (for example, where the actual cost of a meal is claimed) be based on either of the required options, these being specific deduction values and percentages of the per diem's total value?

How secure is the system?

Are the details of users' credit cards, card transactions, bank accounts and/or other sensitive information visible to system administrators?

How flexible are allocations?

Can the whole expense claim and individual line items be allocated to any combination of cost centre(s) and/or project code(s)? If they can be, how is access to allowable cost centres and project codes managed in order to prevent users from allocating costs to non-allowed codes?

Can the system work in complex environments?

How does the system accommodate complex environments where multiple financial systems are in use, each of which may have a different chart of accounts structure? Can this be accommodated for in a single instance of the application?

Is the system integrated with a self-booking tool?

If the system is integrated with a self-booking tool, are business policies defined just once for both the expense management application and the self-booking tool, or do they need to be separately defined for each application? Equally, how are inconsistencies between the booked cost of an item and the actual invoice value reconciled in the case of hotel costs, for example?

How well does the expense claim solution integrate with your core business systems?

Are integrations with your core business systems handled fully automatically with inbuilt error checking and reporting, or are you expected to manually manipulate data files to import and export data from the system? Can data from third parties, such as fuel card and mobile telephone providers, be uploaded to the system automatically?

Get more information.

The responses to these 10 questions are critical for any organisation that is considering an enterprise-wide expense claim automation solution. While many other aspects of expense management solutions, such as the ability to approve documents via a Blackberry or other PDA devices, fall into the category of nice-to-haves, the capabilities discussed above are fundamental to a system's suitability for your business and the realisation of the benefits you're hoping to achieve from it.

If you'd like to understand how enterprise-class expense management applications manage these demanding requirements, please contact our Expense Management team on 0800 555789 or by email at marketinguk@infor.com

> "The audit capabilities of Infor's application were so impressive that our internal compliance staff requested the same system for vendor disbursement requests."
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> ELIZABETH ERIKSEN, ASSISTANT VP, ACCOUNTING, RAYMOND JAMES & ASSOCIATES

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