

# Web-Based Apps Target Big Savings

Automated processes put managing T&E, purchasing costs in crosshairs

Everyone hates paperwork – from the sales rep filling out the umpteenth expense report to the CFO fighting to control costs to the CEO trying to maintain margins in the face of recessionary revenues. Paperwork is costly, time consuming and unproductive.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Web based applications are taking aim at two long-entrenched cost categories for organizations in both the private and public sectors – the paperwork behind travel and entertainment and purchasing.

For many organizations, travel and entertainment (T&E) expense represents their second largest category of controllable costs, after staff. The indirect cost of processing T&E expenses adds as much as 10% to the total, or anywhere from \$36 to \$76 for

every expense report, according to American Express. The math is simple – \$5 million in T&E expenses adds (or actually subtracts from the bottom line) \$500,000 to process them. Automating the expense management process can cut those costs 70% to 80%.

"Until six or seven years ago, companies didn't really know what it costs them to process an expense report," says Ashok Dhar, CEO of Virtual Communications, Inc., whose ExpenseAnywhere software automates expense management. "Even today, some very large companies aren't automated."

Three versions of ExpenseAnywhere are tailored to the needs of large corporations, small and medium-sized businesses, and government entities. All share the ability to save time and money at each step of the T&E expense management proc-

ess, from pre-travel authorization to expense-report filing, supervisory approvals and finance department processing. They integrate with the organization's existing IT platform and accounting system. As Dhar points out, the savings drop straight to the bottom line.

It is therefore not surprising that many corporate CFOs are vigorously looking at controlling costs. In today's economic climate, it makes even more sense.

Corporate purchasing, especially of basic items like pens and paper towels, is another area ripe for reaping savings. More and more businesses, governments & school systems are shifting from purchase orders to procurement cards (P-cards) which are essentially credit cards dedicated to corporate procurement. RPMG Research Corpo-

ration estimates P-card spending in North America grew from \$110 billion to \$137 billion between 2005 and 2007. It's predicted to grow 12% a year through 2012 and reach \$218 billion.

But, according to Dhar, more than 90% of businesses and government offices with P-cards still use paper-based systems to review and process transactions. They're leaving enormous savings on the table; savings that can be captured with Web-based solutions, which can also provide better management, spend control and transparency with better information on purchasing patterns, strategic sourcing and diverse spend with a high degree of compliance to corporate policies.

The benefits of automating paper-based processes are many and far-reaching. Employees get re-

imbursed more quickly, for example. They can file travel expense reports from anywhere, no longer having to dig out from under a mountain of accumulated paperwork when they get home. The risk of duplicated expenses or fraudulent or unapproved purchases is greatly reduced. Hassles like currency translation or mileage calculations are handled automatically. Perhaps most important, management gets better, faster, more complete information that enables more informed decision making.

The key, Dhar says, is robustness and ease of use. "These systems touch everyone, the entire organization. That's their leverage. They have to be robust and, at the same time, extremely user-friendly. The less support and training that's required, the bigger the pay-off is for everyone."

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