EKZ relies on automated invoice receipt from Conextrade

Efficient and digital solution

EKZ (Elektrizitätswerke des Kantons Zürich (utility company of the Canton of Zurich)) is one of the largest energy suppliers in Switzerland and supplies electricity to around one million people cost-effectively, securely and in an environmentally friendly manner. In recent years, the EKZ Group has grown significantly at home and abroad. In addition to the parent company EKZ, the EKZ Group also has six subsidiaries. EKZ and its subsidiaries receive around 110,000 supplier invoices per year. The goal is to move away from paper and towards an efficient, digital, automated and environmentally friendly solution.

Automated and time-saving creditor invoice processing

In the past, EKZ manually scanned all incoming paper invoices, read them using OCR software, then processed them and transferred them to the SAP system. In addition to the significant manual effort, there were often technical challenges over time, such as the fact that the workflows for invoice release or the OCR software were no longer up to date.

Thomas Altenburger, Head of the Finance & Accounting department, had the creditor processes and the digitisation possibilities analysed. The result was that very significant optimisation potential existed. EKZ then decided to work with external professional providers in order to digitise the process.

EKZ opted for the E-Invoicing service from Conextrade. In February 2008, the project and operating contract was signed. This was followed by the integration project, which was implemented in the second quarter of 2008. From then on, EKZ received purely electronic and VAT-compliant invoices digitally via Conextrade. EKZ was then able to receive 30% of incoming invoices as "E-Invoicing" instead of on paper in the first year of introduction, with a corresponding supplier roll-out.

The incoming paper invoices were scanned and processed by EKZ itself. Over time, however, there were always new challenges. The ageing hardware, the need for a back-up scanner for emergencies and software updates posed challenges for EKZ. The situation became untenable and a suitable solution had to be found. Instead of a time-consuming and costly upgrade of the scanners, the OCR software and the workflow, Thomas Altenburger looked for a more efficient and economical solution.

Here several interested providers, including Conextrade from Swisscom, presented their solutions. Ultimately, an evaluation grid was created and the evaluation completed. EKZ's management opted for the "Scanning2E-Invoicing" service from Conextrade for the following reasons: Conextrade was able to cover all of EKZ's requirements and had the best price/performance ratio. Furthermore, EKZ already had a productive interface to Conextrade.

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Project implementation

For these reasons, EKZ decided in 2013 to supplement the "E-Invoicing" service already in use with the "Scanning2E-Invoicing" service. This enabled EKZ to outsource the entire paper process from the PO box to the work preparation, the OCR process and the post processing, to Conextrade. The project was launched in autumn 2013. EKZ went live at the beginning of 2014. In 2015, a further step was added to the process with the "PDF2E-Invoicing" service. This was done in order to achieve a faster supplier roll-out in the SME sector. With this service, suppliers can easily submit their PDF invoices for EKZ to Conextrade by e-mail. These are then processed by Conextrade and transferred to EKZ's SAP system as an E-Invoice.

During the project and test phase, it was soon apparent that the selected workflow was not designed for mass business. Due to the volume, automation at EKZ is more intensive than at a smaller company. The workflow thus had to be adapted to the needs of EKZ.

In the initial phase, the changeover meant that the suppliers now had to deliver the invoices to the central mailbox rather than to EKZ, which involved some extra work.

Finally, the project was successfully completed and handed over to productive operation. Everything was now digital and fully electronic — away from paper.

"E-Invoicing" supplemented with "Scanning2E-Invoicing" brings efficiency, structure and cost savings

Conextrade's additional offering of "Scanning2E-Invoicing" and also the cost-benefit ratio were the big advantages for EKZ.

"The entire package and the timing were perfect; there was already a collaboration in place as well and, in consideration of looking after the environment, paperless working was a plus point," notes Thomas Altenburger.

There were several contact persons involved in this project: EKZ, Conextrade, the workflow provider and EKZ's external provider of IT systems — who all had to be well coordinated.

Comprehensively well served with multi-channel E-Invoicing from Conextrade

With the services "E-Invoicing", "Scanning2E-Invoicing" and "PDF2E-Invoicing", EKZ has digital input for all supplier invoices. Regardless of whether the supplier is connected directly to Conextrade or to an interconnect partner and whether he or she uses the Conextrade portal for manual entry or continues to send paper invoices or PDF invoices to Conextrade by e-mail, Conextrade is the digital channel for all invoices!

The goal of processing large numbers of invoices while continuing to work with existing staff was thus achieved. The entire workflow could now be controlled and optimised throughout and processes could be distinctly improved.

With Conextrade services, EKZ benefits from VAT-compliant and purely electronic invoice receipt — regardless of the original format of the invoice (electronic, paper, PDF) — and with considerably less effort.

"With Conextrade's innovative solution, we were able to digitise our "E-Invoicing" & "Scanning2E-Invoicing" processes and make them significantly more efficient, cost-effective and environmentally friendly," says Thomas Altenburger with conviction.

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