ePay Online Payment Request System

UCR Computing & Communications

"*Thank goodness for ePay! With budgetary cuts and staff reductions, every unit is expected to do more with fewer resources. ePay streamlines processes and improves internal controls. ePay is a smart system, guided by business rules, that assists the user with properly categorizing and coding transactions, determines the appropriate approval routing, and ensures separation of duties. ePay seamlessly interfaces with our accounts payable module, eliminating redundant key entry. The system is transparent; anyone with ePay access can determine exactly where the transaction is or has been in the approval process. ePay is a "win-win" for the campus departments and the Accounting Office. *"

- Associate Vice Chancellor Bobbi McCracken, Finance & Business Operations

Background

ePay was designed to be the "smartest system" ever developed and deployed on the UCR campus. In this environment of budget cuts and staffing reductions, online business applications simply must become more sophisticated to eliminate mistakes and wasted time associated with re-routing and re-working a given request within an online system. Extraordinarily complex business rules have been embedded into ePay to completely eliminate the need for office oversight, and re-work, and standardize and automate workflow and routing. The vision behind this software is to "get it right the first time." All mistakes, violations of policy, and improper coding of financial transactions are immediately detected as they happen, and the system requires them to be corrected before any payment request can be sent on for approval and payment. This

eliminates the wasted time often associated with re-routing and re-working a single request back and forth through an online business application.

Highlights

ePay represents a giant leap forward for the payment request process in terms of efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness. These improvements are achieved through the following key features of ePay:

- *Intelligent Online Application* – Transactors complete the entire request online through a dynamic, user-responsive web interface and submit instantly for further approval.
- *Assigning of Appropriate Roles* – ePay builds a comprehensive system in which roles are assigned to specific groups of individuals replicating the approval process, from initiating Requestor to Departmental Approver to Accounting.
- *Integrated Enterprise Access* – Campus faculty & staff access ePay via UCR's campus portal, with single-sign-on integration and roles controlled via UCR's Enterprise Access Control System (EACS).
- *Completely Online Review* – Campus employees who have been granted appropriate access can review and provide comments on a request —including all supporting documents—online, simultaneously, and from anywhere in the world.
- *Flexible Electronic Routing* – Approval routings and certifications are logged and recorded for reference and audit purposes. Routing transfers generate emails which are sent to the appropriate approver, based on EACS role assignments, allowing for complete transparency throughout the payment request lifetime.
- *Incorporating and Enforcing Business Rules* – ePay follows robust edit-checks that enforce business rules and dynamic transactional approval routing, which, in conjunction with good financial controls and management oversight, creates an environment of effective and efficient transactions.

Project Details

- Access to ePay is authorized via UCR's Enterprise Access Control System (EACS) and includes Transactor and multiple approver roles (Approver, Pre-Approver, Department Approver and Organizational Approver).
- Users access ePay through UCR's online administrative Authorized Applications portal. Users may access this web-based application from the office, home, or even while traveling – from anywhere in the world, day or night!
- The ePay application supports three different types of payment requests:
    - Single Payee, Single Payment
    - Multi Payee, Multiple Payments
    - Business Meetings/Entertainment Payments
- A variety of payment requests can be processed, including but not limited to:
    - Petty Cash Reimbursements
    - Refunds
    - Memberships
    - Business Meetings/Entertainment Reimbursements
- ePay incorporates online edits tailored to the specific payment type. Online edit checks reduce errors and ensure the appropriate policy and procedures have been enforced.
- ePay includes the option to upload supporting documentation, thereby reducing the need for paper files.
- The Routing and Approval process is dynamic and determined by the type of payment request.
- The ePay application provides a graphical representation of the routing path for each payment request, including the status of the payment request and a historical approval log noting each user who has processed and approved the payment request.
- Email notifications are generated as payment requests move through the routing and approval process.
- Payments may be processed either by check or Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT).

- The ePay search engine provides end users an efficient means of researching payments, reducing the need to maintain paper files.

- The ePay application streamlines the entire payment request process, as users enter/prepare the payment request, as campus approvers review the payment request, and as the Accounting Office finalizes the request and generates the reimbursement.

Technical Highlights:

- ePay is built upon UCR's common Oracle/Solaris enterprise platform.

- UCR's security best practices are enforced throughout ePay. The system utilizes Central Authentication Services (CAS) for user authentication (providing single sign-on access with the campus portal) and encrypts all data via SSL.

- EPay connects with and draws all user roles from UCR's enterprise routing & workflow engine, the Enterprise Access Control System (EACS).

- EPay makes extensive use of web services to communicate financial information with the UCR Financial System and SecurePay. In particular, all accounts payable transactions that generate payments and general ledger journal lines are completely automated via web services. Additionally, journal lines that are created directly from the ePay system without going through vouchers payable are also automated via web services. These web services and the code related to the PeopleSoft Component Interface Infrastructure are reusable and available to other UC campuses and medical centers.

Responses

"As with the many other systems that have been developed by UCR Computing & Communications (C&C) in partnership with campus management and campus users, the ePay system is a success in facilitating the accomplishment of tasks that in the past were labor-intensive and prone to errors. As a web-based system, ePay is accessible from any computer, which allows users to process and approve disbursements from both the office and at home…even on the road while traveling to meetings at UCOP and elsewhere. Prior to this system, reimbursement approvals often had to wait days or even weeks while managers were away from the office; now they are approved expeditiously. The edit checks incorporated into the system have reduced errors and re-work, which is an important need during these times of staff reductions. The electronic routing using workflow allows for users to identify where an ePay transaction is located in the approval process, speeds-up the routing, and minimizes "lost" paperwork. Finally, the ease and comprehensiveness of the search feature provides a quick and easy way to research payments without having to maintain files and dig through them, which can be both time-consuming and labor-intensive. The ePay system has made my work easier and has allowed me to have more confidence in the accuracy of transactions.

Overall, I believe that the ePay system is another homerun for C&C and the campus!"

- Karim H. Zahedi, Executive Officer, Office of the Chancellor and EVC/Provost

"Our department started using ePay in October, 2010. This web-based application has been great. Very easy to use. You can do anything in this application (create, search, look up rules, etc.). The electronic routing is good. You do not have to wait for days to get someone's signature approval. You can get everyone's approval in one day. If you need to look up Business Rules it is right there for you; everything you want is in front of you. People have come to me and said they liked the EFT payments. It goes right into their bank account instead of [requiring their] coming in the office to pick up their checks. It saves time on everyone. I can look up and see who has not approved their reimbursement and send them an e-mail to go back in ePay and approve. ePay has saved a lot of time in processing reimbursements for everyone."

- Jodie Messin, Accounting Assistant, Dept. of Botany & Plant Sciences

"Before ePay was implemented, I was very frustrated with our paper-based payment processing system. The form 5s that I submitted would require up to two approval signatures within our organization before final review and approval in Accounting. The total processing time, on average, was probably around three weeks. More often than I would like to remember, the form 5 would end up buried on somebody's desk, and I would have to track it down without having any idea where it actually was. Sometimes the form could not be found and I would have to start the process again from the beginning. This would not only take more of my time and attention, but was a source of frustration for our vendors as well, who, in turn, would not be as accommodating as we would like in terms of continuing to provide their essential services while waiting up to a month to receive their payments from previous services provided. The end result was strained relationships with vendors and UCR staff. When I learned that ePay was in the works, I jumped on the opportunity to be part of the solution and help to test and develop the system.

It has been a year and a half since then, and everything has changed so much. The average payment processing time has been reduced to about a week. In the rare case that a vendor has to follow-up with me about a payment, it takes just a minute to see where the request has gotten "stuck" and contact the staff member to offer my assistance in moving the request along. As a result, our vendors have become much more flexible and cooperative, and my relationships with all of the staff involved in the approval process have improved drastically. I now have more time to focus on vendor selection and price comparisons, so I can do my best to find the best services at the best prices possible.

I am encouraged by this process improvement, and I hope that there are many more to come!"

- Roy Feliciano, Purchasing and Travel Coordinator, Finance Office: International Education Programs

"From its genesis to its current release, ePay has continually improved the payment process. The web-based ePay system allows transactors and approvers to review a transaction simultaneously, from their own offices, reducing, literally, the flow of papers in the halls. The electronic routing process means no more searching for paperwork on people's desks and no more wondering if or when original documents were transmitted to Accounting. Certainly, eliminating the movement of paperwork has led to quicker payments to our vendors. What is better than happy vendors? Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the ePay pilot."

- A Delighted ePay User

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Project Site – http://epay.ucr.edu
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