

smrtr

The AP Automation Efficiency Guide

A step-by-step playbook for manufacturing and food & beverage finance leaders ready to trade invoice chaos for real-time AP control.

Built for ERP users

Another month-end close just wrapped. And if you're like most finance leaders, you're staring at data that's already outdated, a team stretched thin on manual processing, and a nagging question: do I need to hire more people just to keep up?

The answer is no, but only if you automate the right things, in the right order. This guide walks you through exactly how to implement AP automation across your finance function, step by step, so you can eliminate the manual work, capture every early payment discount, and close the books faster, without adding headcount.

\$14.32 → \$2.50 Cost per invoice manual vs smrtr	14 → 2.8 days Approval cycle time reduction	80%+ Invoices approved without human touch	<30 days Average time to go live
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WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE

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The 7-Step AP Automation Playbook

Work through each step in order. Each one builds on the last, and each one moves a measurable cost or time metric in the right direction.

1 Baseline your current AP cost

Before you automate anything, establish what manual AP is actually costing you.

Run this calculation: monthly invoice volume $\times$ average cost per invoice (\$14.32 industry average) $\times$ 12.

That is your annual baseline. Also capture: average approval cycle time, exception rate, and AP staff hours spent on invoice processing each week. These are your before numbers.

Most finance leaders who run this exercise find a number between \$200,000 and \$600,000 per year, just to process invoices that could largely approve themselves.

My AP Cost: _____

2 Eliminate manual invoice ingestion

The first manual step to eliminate is data entry. Invoices arrive in PDF, EDI, email, and paper formats and someone on your team is re-keying that data into your ERP or a spreadsheet.

smrtr reads every invoice format on arrival using AI-driven OCR and data extraction. Supplier, amount, line items, PO reference captured automatically, passed to the matching engine. No human touch required.

Impact: typically eliminates 60–70% of AP data entry time in the first 30 days.

Automate Invoice Ingestion: _____

3 Automate three-way matching

Three-way matching, verifying that the invoice, purchase order, and goods receipt all agree before payment is the core control in manufacturing AP.

Automate it at line-item level, not just header level. Configurable tolerance thresholds by supplier category mean routine variances clear automatically. For partial receipts, the system holds the unmatched balance and reconciles when the second shipment arrives; no manual tracking required.

Automate 3-Way Matching: _____

4 Build intelligent exception routing

Exceptions are inevitable. The question is whether they go to the right person immediately or sit in a generic AP queue until someone figures out who should handle it.

Intelligent exception routing sends each exception to its operational owner: quantity discrepancies go to receiving, price variances go to procurement, missing receipts go to the warehouse.

In multi-plant environments, routing is site-specific. Plant A's exceptions go to Plant A's team.

Nothing gets lost in a central queue.

Build Intelligent Exception Routing: _____

5 Create real-time AP visibility

Most AP teams can't answer basic questions without pulling a report: how many invoices are outstanding, what's in exception status, what's the current exception rate by supplier?

Real-time AP visibility means a live dashboard showing every invoice in the pipeline where it is, who it's with, and how long it's been there. Exception rates by supplier and invoice category are tracked automatically.

For CFOs: cash flow forecasting based on real AP data. For the AP team: time for decisions, not data entry.

Create AP Dashboard: _____

"The AP team that used to spend 70% of its time on data entry and exception chasing now spends that time on cash flow analysis and vendor relationship management."

smrtr customer — food and beverage manufacturer, three production plants

6 Capture early payment discounts at scale

Early payment discounts are one of the highest-ROI opportunities in AP and one of the most consistently missed.

The reason: when invoice approval takes 14 days, the 10-day discount window is already closed.

With automated matching and exception routing, average approval cycle time drops from 14 days to under 3.

That opens discount windows your team hasn't been able to access.

smrtr customers in manufacturing and food & beverage routinely capture \$150,000 to \$350,000 in additional early payment discounts in their first year.

Capture Early Payment Discounts: _____

7 Lock in your audit archive

Every invoice smrtr touches is stored permanently, timestamped, searchable, and retrievable in seconds.

Full approval chain, exception documentation, goods receipt confirmation, payment status. All of it.

When your auditors ask for invoice #4471 from 16 months ago, your team pulls it in under 60 seconds not two days of searching through email threads and ERP exports.

Built-in compliance. No add-ons. No additional storage fees. The audit archive is included as standard.

Build Audit Archive: _____

What the full playbook delivers

Finance leaders who work through all seven steps typically see the following outcomes within the first 90 days of going live with smrtr.

Speed	Control	Visibility
— Invoice processing: 14 days → under 3 — Month-end AP close accelerated by 60%+ — Early payment discount windows accessible — AP team freed from data entry	— Duplicate invoices caught before payment — Price variances flagged at line-item level — Nothing paid until goods receipt confirmed — Every exception documented with full audit trail	— Live AP dashboard — every invoice, real time — Exception rate tracked by supplier category — Cash flow forecasting from real AP data — Board-ready AP metrics generated automatically

YOUR IMPLEMENTATION READINESS CHECKLIST

✓ Current monthly invoice volume documented ✓ Cost per invoice baseline calculated ✓ ERP system identified (Syspro / VAI / NCR / NetSuite) ✓ AP team hours on manual processing quantified ✓ Exception rate by supplier category assessed	✓ Early payment discount windows mapped by supplier ✓ Multi-plant routing requirements documented ✓ Audit retrieval SLA defined (target: under 60 seconds) ✓ IT and finance stakeholders aligned on go-live timeline ✓ 90-day success metrics agreed in writing
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Ready to see your numbers?

We will show you your current cost per invoice, benchmark it against manufacturers your size, and map out exactly what the seven steps look like for your operation.

Request your free AP assessment → smtrtsolutions.com