

Vendor Inquiry of Payment and PO Information via the Web

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Abstract

The web-based vendor inquiry application developed by the University of Arkansas facilitates a vendor's inquiry as to payment, invoice, and Purchase Order information, without having to pick up the phone.

Information relating to invoice payments, remittance advise information, and Purchase Order information is readily available for a vendor to look up by simply providing their FIN (Federal Identification Number) when requesting the information. As long as the FIN entered 'matches' the FIN associated with the vendor on the PO, invoice, or check number requested, the requested information will be displayed. Not only that, but an image of the invoice is also available for viewing. This service is also available for those individuals who travel on behalf of the University of Arkansas. This is a great service for those individuals who do not have access to our internal system.

Organization

Founded in 1871, the University of Arkansas, located in Fayetteville, is the original, flagship campus of the University of Arkansas System. It is a public land and space grant institution. The University is a Carnegie Research Extensive institution and is also Arkansas' only doctoral research university.

Problem/Initiative

Over the past two years, our campus has made a conscious effort to look at specific functions and, where applicable, use the Web as a tool to further provide services to the campus and the community.

As with all campus', we have a tremendous amount of data stored internally within our Business and Financial system, but unless an individual has been granted specific access to this system, the data is unavailable for viewing. We realized that some of this information could be very beneficial to vendors who were looking for payment information, researching check information, or simply inquiring about a specific Purchase Order.

After discussions with Accounts Payable and Purchasing, their offices consistently receive the following questions and statements:

1. Has my invoice been received and when will payment be made?

2. I received a check, but the remittance advice was removed and I don't know what invoices made up the amount.
3. I have misplaced the PO and would like to have another copy.

As we reviewed those statements, we realized very quickly that this was all information that could be supplied via the Web to vendors without them having to pick up the phone. The trick was being able to provide a link to this information that was unique to a vendor so that only THEIR information was available for viewing.

Design

We do not require a FIN (Federal Identification Number) when initially doing business with a vendor, unless it is an individual traveling on behalf of the University or if the Purchase Order or invoice is for a 1099 payment, but do actively request that all vendors fill out a W-9 when doing business with us. By actively pursuing this FIN we felt that we had a link to use to identify the vendor that was attempting to locate information via our website. Currently approximately 90% of our vendors who have done business with us have provided this information.

When someone accesses our Vendor Inquiry Screen, they are required to enter either a Social Security Number or a Tax Identification Number along with one of the following additional pieces of information:

1. Check Number
2. Invoice Number

3. Purchase Order Number

As long as the FIN entered 'matches' the FIN in our system related to the requested information, the information is available for viewing. For example, if a check number is entered, the system displays ALL of the invoices that make up the check amount along with any comments associated with an invoice. The image of each invoice is also available for viewing if the vendor desires.

Implementation

A web page was designed strictly with vendor information in mind. Designing the web page was the easy part. The tricky part was making sure that we were not only accessing the correct information, but that the information was displayed in a format that a vendor could easily understand.

Also, the website is only as good as the use it receives. In order for vendors to use this site, they had to know it existed so we print the website address on ALL Purchase Orders issued and on the face of each check.

With a small amount of programming effort, we feel that we are providing another level of service for our campus and community. The information was already there, so it was only a matter of defining the link to access the information, testing the data for accuracy, and defining a plan to get the word to the vendors. No additional equipment was required.

Benefits

Having this site available has provided another level of service to many of our vendors.

The purpose of this site is not to eliminate all calls, but to provide another tool for our users to find information for themselves. Our Purchasing and Accounts Payable staff has realized the benefits of this site, in fewer phone calls inquiring about this type of information. As for those vendors who have not provided an FIN, and attempt to use this site, they realize that by providing us with this information they will be able to have their information at their fingertips; otherwise, the information will not be accessible.