TOSHIBA

Case Study: Charlies Stores

Automating invoicing enhances efficiency, streamlines processes and reduces errors.

Knowledge
On Demand

Home, garden and outdoors retailer, enhance efficiency by automating invoicing, streamlining processes, reducing errors, and saving time with Toshiba's innovative workplace solutions.

Charlies Stores supply a whole range of products for the home, garden and great outdoors. They have been operating for nearly 40 years, and are proud to be an independent, family-run retailer. In the early days there was only a small team, many of whom remain today, but now there are nearly 450 team members and nine stores across Wales and the borders. They also have a successful Ecommerce business.

Whilst the company has grown, the passion and values it was founded on remain the same; they only sell products that they would be happy to take home themselves, and work hard to ensure they are fantastic value for money. Alongside this sits their belief in looking after customers, who will always be greeted by friendly, knowledgeable colleagues with good advice.

A challenge for the finance team

Charlies is a unique retail company offering products from footwear and cooking utensils, all the way through to chainsaws and camping. With a turnover of £85 million and nine busy retail sites, their finance department has to manage over 70,000 products from in excess of 1,000 suppliers. Rachel Davies - Senior Management Accountant, spoke about some of the problems, "We were facing significant operational challenges with our invoicing system, which was both time-consuming and cumbersome. All purchase invoices and credit notes received via email had to be manually printed, as well as Goods Receipt Notes (GRNs), which were attached to delivery notes and sent to the Head Office. The paper copies

of these documents had to be matched, by hand, adding further delays to the processing cycle. Each invoice required manual entry into our Streetwise system, including critical details such as supplier codes, invoice references, purchase orders, and VAT information, with VAT splits done manually."

Rachel continued, "Once entered, invoices sat on the supplier account awaiting processing. Invoices were then matched manually to GRNs, with a small tolerance threshold for variances. Anything beyond that required the accounts team to identify and resolve the discrepancy, which could be caused by factors such as pricing errors, shortages, damages, or incorrect bookings. These variances required specific codes to be entered into Streetwise, further slowing down the process. Additionally, Streetwise was overloaded with activities across stock, ordering, sales, and till operations, which impacted its speed and efficiency."

Charlies Stores turned to Toshiba for guidance on improving the efficiency of their invoice processing.

A partner for solutions

Toshiba had been a trusted partner of Charlies Stores for several years, supplying a wide range of technology solutions across the business, including their MFP fleet and barcode label printing. This long-standing collaboration fostered a strong, close relationship between the two companies. With Toshiba's extensive portfolio that also included process automation software, Charlies Stores turned to them for guidance on improving the efficiency of their invoice processing. Scott Wood, Lead Solutions Consultant at Toshiba, talked about the issues. "Charlies had a complex manual process, which was incredibly labour intensive, reports were only updated into Sage, once per day. Invoice, GRN, and delivery note packs with variances were filed in multiple locations depending on the error type— pricing issues were sent to buyers for review, while claims or booking errors were filed separately. This filing system consumed significant time and space, making it difficult to track and identify invoice issues, especially when suppliers called and no notes had been added to Sage. They needed automation that would seamless integrate all the solutions together and provide real-time data."

Streamlining the process

Toshiba recommended DocuWare combined with ADS as Charlies Stores required a robust and efficient solution to address the complexities of their existing processes and ultimately streamline approval workflows.

Scott continued, "We proposed both ADS Capture and DocuWare to tackle these challenges effectively. ADS Capture automates the extraction and classification of invoice data, ensuring accurate and efficient data processing whilst also acting as the seamless integrator between their existing systems. DocuWare then serves as a centralised document management and forms creation platform providing Charlies with both data integrity and an efficient digital document repository. Together, these solutions would enable real-time data synchronisation with Streetwise and Sage, eliminate manual errors, and expediting the resolution of invoice queries by routing them to the appropriate approvers. This comprehensive approach would not only enhance operational efficiency but also support Charlies Stores in achieving greater transparency and control."

Impressed with the scope and scale of the software Charlies took the decision to deploy the solution across their estate, working with the Toshiba team to integrate into existing systems.

A solution to reduce invoice processing time and improve overall operational efficiency across retail estate.

Improving operational efficiency

The implementation of the new system has delivered significant improvements in operational efficiency for Charlies. Month-end close for the profit and loss statement is now completed two weeks earlier than with the old system, allowing for more timely preparation of management accounts for senior management and directors.

The financial external audit process has also been streamlined, with the audit team gaining direct access to documents via DocuWare, eliminating the need to sift through old files and archive boxes, this has also led to a more efficient audit process. The system has also reduced the impact of holiday leave and illnesses on invoice processing, as the team can now catch up and support each other. During peak times, such as new season stock changes, the team has been able to stay on top of invoice processing. Additionally, claim forms are now easily viewable, enabling buyers to identify recurring issues with specific suppliers, while BIE (Booking in Error) forms allow store and warehouse managers to monitor workload levels and provide additional training if consistent errors are identified. Rachel talked about the benefits, "Since going live, the average weekly document processing rate has been 1,797, and over 93,000 invoices and credit notes have been processed on ADS. Where we were closing our PL (Purchase Ledger) on the 20th of the month, we are now able to do this around the 8th, giving the staff more time to chase queries, reconcile supplier statements to PL balances and spend time on other tasks.

We have a lot more confidence in the accuracy of the data, especially in relation to the VAT, which allowed us to have a seamless and stress-free financial year end."

Aside from the efficiency improvements Charlies Stores have full visibility, Rachel explained, "The Toshiba team has created a report that allows me to track invoice approvals and identify any variances, ensuring proper approval from buyers. Unlike before, where invoices were scattered across the office, I can now see how many invoices are awaiting processing in ADS, how many have been exported to Sage, and how many tasks are in DocuWare. We maintain a weekly log of invoices and credit notes processed by each team member, tracking their averages. ADS also shows the average processing time for each user, helping me monitor progress and ensure we stay on track to meet the monthly closing schedule."

Delivering a tailored package to seamlessly integrate into Charles Stores finance processes.

As a growing business Charlies Stores are constantly evolving and currently looking at other parts of the business that could benefit from efficiency improvements, Rachel concluded on the project, "Working with the Toshiba team has been a fantastic experience. As a high-volume, multi-site retail operation, we needed a solution that would truly align with our business needs. Toshiba took the time to listen, understand, and deliver a tailored package that has seamlessly integrated into our finance processes. This efficiency has even freed up time for us to hold regular team meetings to discuss company performance and goals. We're excited to continue our partnership with Toshiba and would wholeheartedly recommend them to other businesses that are looking to take the first steps into automation."

"Working with the Toshiba team has been a fantastic experience. As a high-volume, multi-site retail operation, we needed a solution that would truly align with our business needs. Toshiba took the time to listen, understand, and deliver a tailored package that has seamlessly integrated into our finance processes."

TOSHIBA

Upgrade to
Knowledge on Demand.

About Toshiba Tec

Toshiba Tec UK Imaging Systems Ltd is part of the globally operating Toshiba Tec Corporation.

A leading supplier of workplace solutions, providing innovative technology, enabling value for our customers, in every workplace.

We work with our clients at all levels of their business to understand how we can help find better ways to create, share, store and distribute their knowledge.

Services include managed print services, barcode printing solutions, business process optimisation and effective document management software solutions, managed IT services and digital signage solutions. All designed to ensure a wide-range of industries operate more productively and effectively.

For more information please contact us:

Toshiba Tec UK Imaging Systems Ltd

T: 0843 224 4944
E: info@toshibatec.co.uk
W: www.toshibatec.co.uk

Knowledge On Demand