Crow Canyon Software

Purchasing System

Using SharePoint & Office 365 as a Purchasing System

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A low cost, configurable, and flexible purchase management system in SharePoint can save substantial time and effort while reducing costs and speeding responses.

Microsoft SharePoint, whether on-premises or as part of Office 365, is an ideal platform for purchase request automation. Using forms and workflows, along with web and mobile technology, SharePoint can provide a comprehensive and effective purchasing system that guides the request from initiation to fulfillment.

The flexible configuration options available in SharePoint enable organizations to meet the various needs of their customers, partners, and internal purchasing departments. With SharePoint's native mobile and responsive cloud-based capabilities, users can interact with the purchasing system on mobile phones and laptops as well as desktops.

A SharePoint-based system can lower costs and speed purchasing with:

- Forms and Portals that are friendly and adaptable to the end user.

- Workflows that drive the approval and fulfillment processes.

- Notifications and Reporting that keep everyone informed.

Within SharePoint, a purchasing program can use engaging interfaces, comprehensive workflows and actions, and tight integration with financial systems and order delivery tools to automate and streamline purchasing approvals and activities.

In this way, SharePoint can play an important role at many organizations as a driver of workplace automation that produces greater efficiency and better customer service.
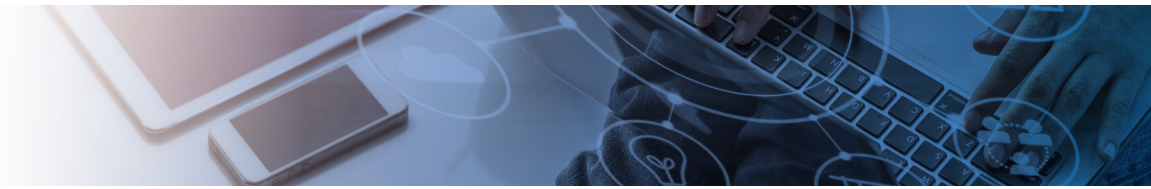
Creating the Purchase Request

SharePoint's capabilities are particularly applicable during the purchase request creation process, where automation, mobile technology, chatbots, and sophisticated routing solutions enable companies to build comprehensive and engaging purchase intake processes.

Flexible, Configurable Forms Drive Purchasing Automation

A purchase request system should, above all else, be designed around the needs of its users. This is critically important during the initial data collection stage; customers and purchasers need to easily interact with the system when defining the purchase request.

The workhorse of the purchase request process is the form. The capabilities of forms depend largely on the capabilities of the underlying purchase request system. SharePoint and Office 365 provide a range of forms creation options (such as our NITRO Studio) that make it possible to meet the needs of the purchase request initiation process.

A purchasing system should offer forms that are:

- Easy to design and configure based on business needs, from functionality to branding;
- Able to access information from any source—such as a catalog with product & pricing data or SharePoint lists—while being able to integrate with existing systems such as a CRM, CMS, ERP, and/or financial system;
- Able to access customer and user data from Active Directory or other databases; and
- Comprehensive enough to support a potentially complex request process (e.g., multiple approvals, multiple routing, automation techniques, mobile operability, etc.).

Mobile Technology for Initiating Purchase Request

Mobile technology has long surpassed traditional desktop and laptop PCs as the means by which users interact with technology. This means that the purchase request system should be mobile-friendly, device-agnostic, and responsive to any display environment. Users should be able to easily submit purchase requests on their smartphones or tables. All parties (e.g., requester, approver(s), etc.) should automatically receive notifications based on configurable trigger events.

Using Chatbots for Purchasing Efficiency

Chatbots can be used to guide the purchasing process. By using SharePoint and Office 365, the system will "know" who the person is based on the login. The department and role of the

person can easily be determined using Active Directory.

With those known factors in place, the chatbot can offer pre-defined purchasing options.

> **Imagine this scenario:** Bill in Sales needs a new laptop. He interacts with the chatbot simply by entering in "I need to replace my laptop". The chatbot is programmed to provide Bill with a list of approved laptops for Sales personnel. Bill selects one of them and the request is then sent to Bill's manager for approval.

In this way, and many others, chatbots can guide the purchasing process and build in a comprehensive layer of efficiency. Employees can quickly get the equipment and assets they need to do their job, while working within company purchasing guidelines.

Flexible, Dynamic, Capable Approval Processes Using Workflows

Every year, thousands of enterprises lose valuable time using internal and external approval processes that are either inflexible, lack configurability, are unreliable, or misconfigured. This is largely due to purchase request systems that fall short of the functionality needed to address highly variable scenarios, such as multi-level approvals and conditional approval routing.

What's needed is a solution that is flexible enough to support the wide array of approval scenarios that organizations encounter on a day-to-day basis.

Varying Complexity Based on Size of Organization and Other Factors

Approval routing and workflows are determined by the particular needs of the company. This could depend on size, industry, location, branches, and more. For example, smaller organizations may only require purchase request approvals from a direct manager or a division head, whereas a large enterprise is likely to require a significantly more complex arrangement.

> Simple Approval Workflows

Typically, small and mid-sized businesses do not require an overly complex approval process. More often than not, a purchase request is

sent to the user's manager for approval and, once approved, the transition to becoming a purchase order can begin. Of course, if approvals are unnecessary, there is no requirement for purchase requests to undergo any type of approval workflow.

A purchase request system should be able to handle multiple variables when determining the approving party in a single-level scenario, such as:

- **By Name:** An approver is specified by name on the purchase request;

- **By Location:** A request may be routed to an approver based on the location of the requester. This is useful for companies with multiple geographically-dispersed offices;

- **By Purchase Type:** Approvers can be assigned to specific purchase or product types. For example, Mr. Smith is responsible for approving purchase requests for IT Hardware while Ms Pemberton approves requests for IT Software;

- **By Role:** Requests can be auto-routed to approvers who work in a specific capacity in the organization, such as a department manager or a team leader. This enables requests to smoothly continue along an approval workflow when named parties are unavailable;

- **By Amount Spent:** Purchases exceeding a specified value may require a different approval workflow; and,

- **By Method of Purchase:** Was the purchase made online? In-person? Via an automated chatbot process? These are all factors that could be used to determine the approving party and/or workflow.

Purchasing can involve simple or complex approvals. A proper system needs to be able to handle both!

> *Complex Approval Workflows*

Complex approval workflows involve multiple levels of review that are dependent on the particulars of the purchase request, such as "who, what, where, and when"? A range of individuals may be called upon to make decisions. These elements are built in to the workflow, with conditions and branching guiding where the next approval is needed and when.

This level of complexity is often required in larger enterprises when more than one party (multi-level) is involved in the approval process.

Examples of these types of workflows include:

- **Parallel Approvals:** a purchase request is sent to multiple approvers. The approval of the purchase request can be made either a) when the first approval is made by one of the recipients or b) when all recipients approve the purchase request (unanimous approval). After approval, the purchase request then moves on to the next stage, which could be another approval or a transition to a purchase order;

- **Serial Approvals:** a purchase request is sent to a series of approvers in a defined

succession. This process is often combined with a criteria definition that triggers subsequent approvals if a condition is met. For example, if a laptop costs less than $1,000, then only the employee's direct manager needs to approve; however, if the laptop exceeds $1,000, then the serial approval is activated and a second approval is required from the finance department; and,

- **Other Factors:** Automated purchase requests can also be associated with an expenditure budget whereby the cost of the requested item(s) needs to be below a certain threshold to qualify for approval. Approval workflows can be as complex as needed depending on the scenario involved — the approval routing can even be subject to the time of day when the request was lodged, which is useful in a globally distributed team scenario or to support regional office hours/holidays.

Importance of Flexibility

A modern purchase request system should be able to expertly handle the purchasing process in terms of automation, offering a streamlined user experience, and routing requests to approver(s) based on highly-configurable settings. Without this level of customization, purchase request systems end up limiting organizations.

"Flexibility" is perhaps the most critical ingredient when looking for a purchase request system that can adapt to the unique business needs of an organization.

The Challenge of Purchase Fulfillment

For many organizations, the fulfillment of purchase orders is a business process responsible for the highest rate of inefficiencies, wasted capital, and misallocation of resources. When a purchase request transitions into a purchase order, the success of the process typically relies on seamless product integration: procurement systems, financial systems, release management systems, asset management systems, and ERP frameworks need to work together to ensure product fulfillment.

The usage of legacy systems or inadequate purchase request systems often results in a reliance on workarounds and custom development, both of which are costly and time-consuming.
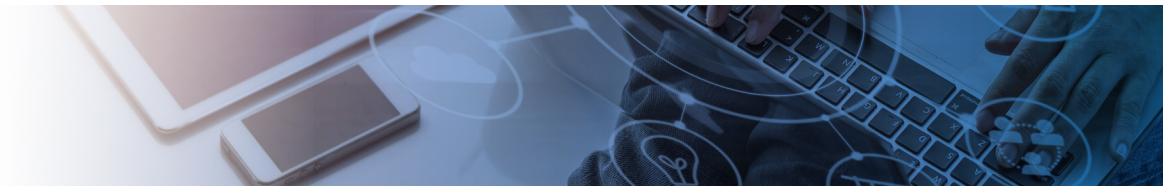
The Process

After the final approval is submitted and fulfillment begin, the purchase request and ordering process can become significantly more complex. The purchase request system needs to be able to seamlessly integrate with multiple external platforms in order to ensure a smooth customer or employee experience

After approval, the purchase request becomes a purchase order. At that stage, the purchase order is typically sent to an asset management system to ensure product availability and then to a financial system or ERP capable of processing and managing the transaction. An entity is billed for the amount, funds are transferred, and then credited or debited to the proper accounts.

Post-transaction, the focus shifts to product delivery. The purchase order is then sent back to an asset or equipment management solution to arrange for fulfillment of the order. Throughout this entire process, the purchase request system should use automated notifications to keep all parties informed of the product order, from initial ordering through to delivery.

Post-delivery, customer engagement processes need to ensure customer satisfaction and potentially trigger product returns or exchanges, if needed.

> **From initiation through approval to fulfillment, an efficient purchasing workflow can streamline the process, reducing time and effort.**

Streamlining the Purchase Process with SharePoint & Office 365

The Purchase Request System from Crow Canyon Software addresses this complexity by streamlining the entire purchase request and order process, from beginning to end. Leveraging the power of Microsoft products, our solutions empower organizations to boost their existing SharePoint and Office 365 environments to effectively configure and manage business process workflows.

Our Purchase Management System enables companies to replace paper-based systems with an electronic solution that improves speed and accountability. All activity is automatically tracked & recorded and management can view the status of requests at-a-glance via intuitive dashboard interfaces.

Like all of our solutions, the Purchase Management System is highly configurable and is able to integrate with any existing financial and procurement systems. It can also be configured to work with our Asset or Equipment management solutions so that products can be automatically created as IT or equipment assets to facilitate ordering, tracking, and delivery.

Business Benefits

Key business benefits of using our Purchase Request System include:

- **Low Cost:** Leverages existing SharePoint and/or Office 365 infrastructure while seamlessly integrating with existing financial and procurement systems;

- **Configurable:** Highly customizable from the ground up. Purchase request approval routing, form workflows, notifications, forms, UI/UX, and nearly all functionality is configurable based on the business's purchasing needs;

- **Flexible:** The program can engage with customers, purchasers, and employees in multiple ways. Forms can be integrated directly into SharePoint, Web-based, or made available on mobile devices. Data can be pulled from multiple sources, such as Active Directory and chatbots, to populate forms based on user input, role, location, etc.;

- **Seamless Process:** The Purchase Request System is designed to streamline the entire purchasing request & order process. Automation plays a significant role in the system — comprehensive configuration enables companies to specify exactly how dynamic forms capture highly relevant purchasing information, how requests flow through the approval process, and how they transition into purchase orders leading to product fulfillment.

Conclusion

Modernizing and streamlining the Purchasing processing is an important part of an organization's "Digital Transformation". By moving to more efficient operations, with the automation provided by SharePoint and Office 365, companies can gain substantial savings in time and costs, while doing a much better job of controlling purchase request and fulfillment.

For many businesses, it is time to forge ahead with a better purchasing system that uses the latest cloud and mobile technologies – and makes life easier for employees, customers, and everyone involved in the purchasing process.

For a fully developed purchasing system that runs on SharePoint and Office 365, see our Purchase Request application.