



Premier Private Jet Service to Increase Efficiency by More than 30% with Invoice Automation

Clay Lacy Aviation manages, maintains and charters private jets for customers including A-list celebrities and sports figures. But operating a growing fleet of advanced jets generates a growing number of complex invoices. And processing them manually was slow, error-prone and demanded full-time attention from 20 staff members. This diminished profits and diverted valuable resources from customer service – until ABBYY FlexiCapture® provided a solution.

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Tom Duffy Sr. Project Consultant, Clay Lacy Aviation



Soaring success, skyrocketing paperwork

For 45 years, Clay Lacy Aviation (CLA) has set the standard for private aviation services worldwide. And as their need for unencumbered travel grows, business leaders and celebrities increasingly rely on CLA to fly, maintain and charter their private jets. As Tom Duffy Sr. Project Consultant explains, “Our services are completely customized to owners’ needs. They rely on us end-to-end for everything from piloting, catering and chartering their jets to handling the invoices billed to them every year.”

However, as CLA’s business grew so did its paperwork – especially the invoices. “One flight generates dozens,” says Duffy. “Pilot pay, airport fees, fuel, etc. A typical owner’s bill is an inch thick and to save them time and money we process it all.” But whether invoices arrived as emails or paper, all were handled manually. This slowed processing times and was error prone. It also meant having to add headcount as business grew. And as Duffy notes, “We add value by looking out for our customers. Staff needed more time to spend on value-added analysis instead of just processing invoices.”

Piloting a more efficient and profitable course with ABBYY

For CLA, automating invoice processing was key to driving greater profitability and customer satisfaction. “We receive 35,000 invoices a year and they’re complex,” explains Duffy. “Each can be many layers deep with tables within tables, within tables. It takes 20 full-time staff to process them. At an average of 30 minutes an invoice that’s 17,500 man-hours a year. And as business grows those numbers do, too.”

About Clay Lacy Aviation

Created in 1968 as the first executive jet charter service on the West Coast, Clay Lacy Aviation is the most experienced operator of private jets in the world. With an extensive charter, maintenance and aircraft management network, the company delivers the highest quality and most reliable corporate aviation services worldwide. For more information, please visit www.claylacy.com.

But simply adding staff was no solution. "As headcount rises so do costs and administrative burden," says Duffy. "It isn't a profitable growth model." Worse, it would do little to improve customer service: "These highly skilled people need to spend their time finding ways to give customers better service for less money," says Duffy. "That's the objective. Paper would still be in their way."

Duffy and his team set a goal: "Automate all the workflows and extract precisely the data people need so that they never see a piece of paper – only what they need to add real value." To achieve this they embarked on a vendor search, finally engaging with Digital Documents to do a conference room pilot. "Superior data capture on the front end was critical," says Pierre van der Westhuizen, Director of Integration Services, "and ABBYY FlexiCapture proved perfect for the task."

Switching to autopilot

"From the standpoint of processes and infrastructure," says Van der Westhuizen, "we faced several challenges." For starters, CLA used BASE System™ an ERP application running on a 30-year old IBM AS400 minicomputer. Routing, approval and entry of invoices was entirely manual and paper-based. And the workflows and invoices were very complex. "Seven workflows required automation. And we'd never seen forms with such complexity," says Van der Westhuizen.

Plus, one invoice might have to be routed to several different AP clerks for approval: "A plane might have four different owners," says Duffy. "Each needs to be billed separately for what they use. We were awash in paper and processing it manually was error-prone."

The team first documented all applicable business rules and then developed automated workflows. "Each had unique differences, so images required annotation during processing," says Van der Westhuizen. This made accurate line item extraction critical for correct routing. "We needed FlexiCapture to capture PDFs or scans of paper invoices, extract the information according to the rules and pass it on to our OnBase® document management system for routing and approval," says Duffy. "The software is proving good on both counts – it's accurate and it smoothly integrates with OnBase."

After establishing rules for its vendors, CLA set up an email address for them to send their invoices to. Once received, the data is extracted by FlexiCapture and sent into OnBase. "The amount of paper we receive is diminishing fast," says Duffy. And even though the implementation is still ongoing, he confirms that results so far are better than expected: "We see significantly greater efficiency with FlexiCapture. Error rates on a number of things have gone from three and four percent down to zero thanks to the software."

The results

Vendors have quickly adapted to CLA's new system – and to the company's benefit. "Nearly 50% of invoices now arrive electronically," says Duffy, "and are run straight into FlexiCapture. Before, we'd print and manually enter them." And as business grows, CLA is seeing another benefit: "The efficiency gains we're realizing mean that we haven't had to hire more staff. Yet our Accounts Payable people have more time to analyze invoices – to our customers' advantage."

But as Duffy points out, this is just the beginning. "With the help of FlexiCapture, we anticipate efficiency improvements of at least 30%. And since our largest volumes of invoices are expenses, we're also putting iPads on all our aircraft next year – every report will go onto those with every trip and be sent straight into FlexiCapture. Improvements like these mean 80% of our invoices will soon be electronic. The rest we'll simply scan. My goal is that our business users will never even see a paper invoice."

Duffy also says that the solution is evolving fast and may soon benefit a wide range of other departments including human resources, charter billing, maintenance and flight operations. "This technology is game changing, yet there was no real learning curve for users. People picked it up quickly and we look forward to bringing its advantages to other business areas."

The Challenge:

Replace inefficient manual processes with automated invoice processing so that CLA can avoid adding headcount as business grows – and staff can devote more time to value-added customer service.

The Solution:

With the help of ABBYY FlexiCapture, CLA is set to increase invoice processing efficiency by over 30%. By replacing manual data input with automatic data capture, FlexiCapture has lowered error rates, dramatically reduced processing times, helped CLA to avoid adding headcount and enabled AP staff to spend more time on value-added services.

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*Tom Duffy Sr.
Project Consultant,
Clay Lacy Aviation*

Learn more at www.ABBYY.com/FlexiCapture