



Attract more business customers to e-bill

Best practice

PostFinance 

Foreword

Electronic invoices are becoming increasingly commonplace in everyday business. In the B2B sector, invoice recipients and issuers alike benefit from end-to-end digital invoice exchange via an ERP/ accounting system. To allow individual companies to fully harness the potential of the solution, as many participants as possible need to be connected to B2B electronic invoicing. If your role is that of invoice issuer, the key to success lies in connecting your customers. But how do you go about persuading your customers to use digital invoices?

Our best practice documents will help you harness the potential of electronic invoices.

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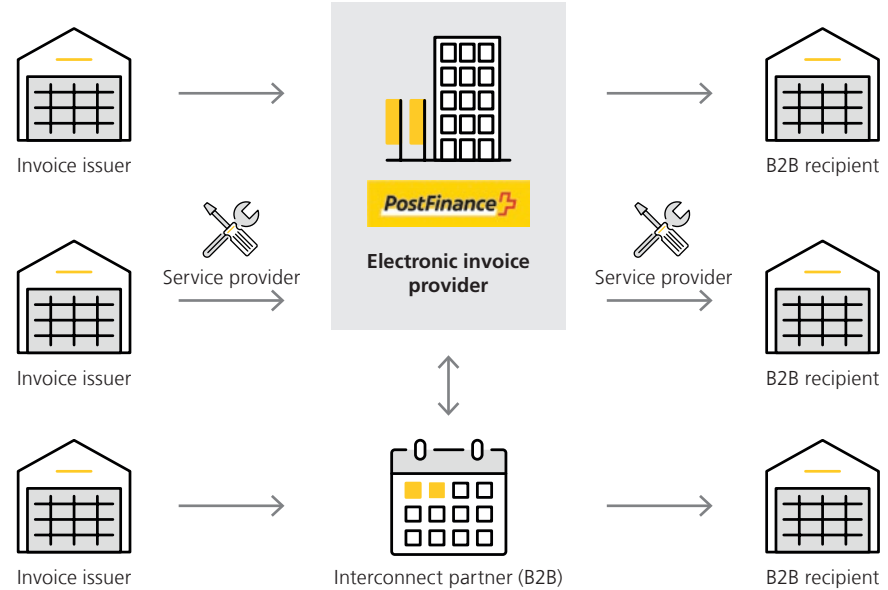


Background

In the past, sending and receiving invoices was straightforward: the invoice issuer printed out the document, sent it by post and could assume that the invoice would reach the recipient a few days later – and that the recipient could enter it in the system and approve it for payment. But in an increasingly digitized world, a rapidly growing number of companies now rely on electronic invoice exchange. This not only saves time, but also cuts costs.

Electronic invoicing offers huge potential if it is used correctly, especially in the B2B sector.

In the following chapters, we explain to you how to benefit your company with the aid of digital invoices.



What types of digital invoices are there?

Paper invoices are becoming less and less important. We would now like to introduce you to two types of electronic invoice and their various forms: the e-mail invoice and the structured invoice (B2B electronic invoice).

The definition of an electronic invoice

An electronic invoice is an electronic document that is delivered electronically and has the same content and legal consequences as a paper invoice. The file format and type of data transfer can vary.

E-mail invoice

The e-mail invoice is basically an invoice in PDF format. The PDF format has three possible forms: the PDF invoice, the QR-bill and the hybrid invoice. These differ in terms of the type of payment details or degree of machine readability.

PDF invoice

The PDF invoice is an unstructured digital invoice that, while it contains an IBAN, also requires a separate payment process: the payment information has to be either transferred to mobile or e-banking, sent to the bank as a payment order by letter or paid over the counter.

QR-bill

Recipients can pay invoices either by scanning the QR code or, as is the case with the PDF invoice, via mobile/e-banking, letter to the bank or directly over the counter. QR-bills do not have to be issued electronically, they can also be sent to invoice recipients by post.

Hybrid invoice

The hybrid invoice consists of both an image file (e.g. PDF) and a data file (e.g. XML). Unlike a structured invoice, the latter focuses on a small amount of key data. For companies with the right software, it is possible to read the structured data automatically. However, this also means that invoice recipients who prefer to process structured data will always need to archive the image file as well.

Structured invoice (B2B electronic invoice)

Digitizing document processing can reduce costs and optimize processes. A structured data set makes automated and seamless processing and interoperability of invoices possible. The company issuing the invoice sends structured invoices via a provider to the software used by the company receiving the invoice. Because the provider converts the format issued by the sender into the recipient's format, the data can be processed automatically. As a rule, the invoice recipient also receives a PDF file, which contains the invoice details and can be checked by staff.

Summary

The more automated processes are, and the greater their compliance with international standards, the more future-proof an invoicing method will be. While switching to these methods may initially involve outlays of time and money, you will save on resources in the medium and long term. In the B2B sector, the structured invoice proves to be the best solution. Because the movement of data is between the accounting software on either side, this method is particularly sustainable, efficient, reliable and secure.

Benefits for your company



You reduce costs

By digitizing processes and automating repetitive tasks, you reduce your workload. Invoice recipients don't have to deal with manual entry in their accounting system, and there are no costs for printing, mailing or paper for invoice issuers.



You improve security

In terms of the date on which payments initiated and made, digital invoices have proven to be much more reliable. They also allow for greater security and control of user data.



You save time

Digital data is processed immediately – in contrast to data that first has to be entered manually (e.g. from letters or e-mails). This streamlines your processes and reduces the potential for error.



You protect the environment

Digital invoices do not need paper, ink or delivery by post. This saves on resources and reduces CO₂ emissions.

Benefits for your customers

Show your customers the benefit of B2B electronic invoices:



Your customers simplify their processes

B2B electronic invoices help them increase process quality in accounts payable management, which in turn saves them time and cuts costs.



Your customers reduce their error frequency

As invoices are sent electronically, and there is no need to keep entering invoice details manually, the potential for errors decreases.



Your customers automate their processes

The automation of accounts payable processes helps improve the transparency and speed of other processes, and any actions can be tracked. Additionally, order-related invoices in particular are paid quickly.



Your customers become more sustainable

By receiving invoices electronically, you eliminate paper invoices, which in turn cuts CO₂ emissions.

Helpful measures – what can you do?

Tip 1: Build up expertise in your company

Make the relevant people in your company aware of the different invoice types and explain how they differ. Ensure in particular that they are aware of the differences between an e-mail invoice and a structured invoice. This will create a common understanding in which everyone is on the same page.

Additional measures, especially for employees who are in contact with customers or who deal with accounts receivable processes: ensure that these employees are familiar with the benefits of structured invoices (B2B electronic invoices) and that they actively offer your customers this option. You can also build up expertise on how to add new invoice recipients to your process and what needs to be taken into account. This will save you from empty runs and from slowing down the process.



Tip 2: Communicate via your own channels

Raise the profile of structured invoices with your customers. Whether it's invoices, newsletters, social media or blog posts: our experience shows us that in-house communication channels are ideally suited to winning customers over.

Use customer touchpoints involving the order and invoicing process to raise the profile of structured invoices among your clientele and, in doing so, increase your number of invoice recipients.

We will provide you with a letter template and an e-mail banner as a resource that you can use to advertise B2B electronic invoices actively.

[Company name]
[Name of contact person]
[Street, house number]
[Postcode, town]

[Recipient company name]
[Name of contact person]
[Street, house number]
[Postcode, town]

We are switching to digital invoicing – we want to connect with you!
[Dear Sir or Madam]

We have laid the base to simplify our processes with you: from now on, we will send invoices to our business partners electronically as structured B2B e-bills via the PostFinance interface.

We have seen that you receive electronic invoices with the recipient ID [please enter recipient ID].

We will be pleased to send you our invoices digitally from [date].

If you have any questions about sending invoices, please contact us at [e-mail@e-mail.ch].

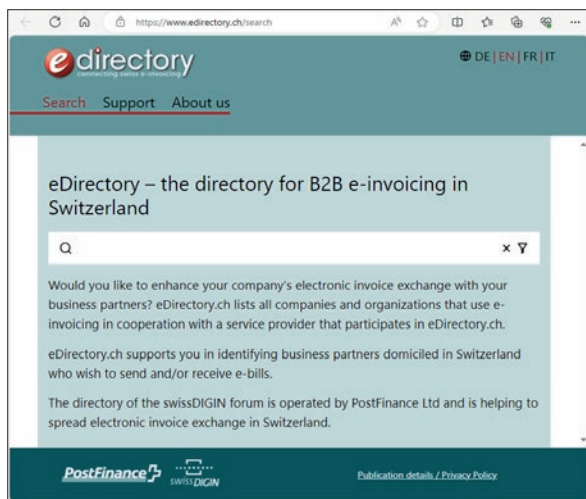
We look forward to continuing our excellent business relationship with you.

Kind regards
[Company, name of contact person, signature]

Tip 3: Find new recipients for structured invoicing (B2B electronic invoices)

To promote the electronic exchange of invoices between companies and organizations, PostFinance operates eDirectory – and supports an initiative of the Swiss Digital Invoice Forum (swissDIGIN). eDirectory is the directory for B2B invoicing in Switzerland. It allows you to identify business partners domiciled in Switzerland who wish to send and/or receive invoices with structured data.

When initiating the changeover to B2B e-bill, it's worth carrying out a comparison with your own customer base to find out which of your customers are already able to receive structured invoices.



Keep at it – it's well worth it

Connecting your customers to B2B electronic invoices will pay off for your company in the long term. The more customers you're able to win over to B2B electronic invoices, the more comprehensively you will be able to digitize your processes for exchanging invoices and the more you will be able to benefit from electronic invoicing.

Think about how you can keep on reminding your customers of the electronic invoice option and make this process as straightforward as possible for them. Is there an exchange platform where you can draw attention to it regularly? Do you refer to B2B electronic invoices on your website and in your order documents? Or perhaps you could quite simply mention on your bills that you offer B2B electronic invoices?

You could also network with other companies in your industry and speak to your customers. After all, you may face similar challenges and be able to come up with joint solutions.



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