

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us



By Kim Lockett.

The pandemic has been hard on everyone in different ways, and though the end is in sight, we're not there yet. But, as we close in on a year and a half of [working from home](#), we can look back with some perspective and perhaps a little pride at how we've adapted and changed. During this time, many people and organizations have discovered that they're much more nimble, creative and resilient than they previously imagined.

I can see that in the accounts payable organizations with whom I have worked. The

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

envelopes, and run through a postage meter before they're mailed. Security and controls are often paper-based, too—safes are kept for blank check stock and sensitive information.

It seems incredible to think that a year and a half ago, that was business as usual for the vast majority of organizations, and not many had plans to change. But change they have.

A New Way of Thinking

Nobody had a plan for sustained remote work. They may have had a short-term disaster recovery plan—for one or two people to work offsite or cover for the absence of a key employee. But nobody had a plan for the entire AP team to be out of the office indefinitely.

The initial struggle was to be able to continue processing payments on time. People brought their laptops home, but not their whole setup. They kept sending skeleton crews to the office to handle the paper processes. The thought was that we'd have to stick it out for a short period. We all know how that turned out.

Around the latter part of April 2020, we started to see people planning for the longer term. Companies set people up with home offices and all the security and connectivity they needed. They had to figure out new ways to communicate and collaborate. They had to figure out how to be productive at home, in many cases while juggling childcare and homeschooling.

At the same time, they started switching vendors to ACH payments in earnest. According to [recent data from Nacha](#), the National Automated Clearinghouse, B2B ACH payments to vendors jumped a whopping 11 percent in 2020. They had to

figure out new processes and new ways to keep information secure. Both of those are

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

By 2025, 56.2 million Americans are expected to be working remotely, an 87% increase from pre-pandemic levels. [A survey by the Pew Research Center](#) found that given the option, more than half of employees say they want to keep working from home even after the pandemic abates.

Employers are becoming comfortable with the idea and are even finding some advantages, including access to a much larger talent pool and the ability to offer flexible work hours as a benefit. That could help AP to address the long-standing talent shortage.

The more significant opportunity, though, is to continue to think differently. I would be surprised if very many AP departments decide to return to the paper processes of old. The biggest reason people stuck with those for so long was that they were “working.” It’s hard to say that now. It’s also hard to say that accounts payable work can only be done in the office because we’ve been doing it outside the office for a year. The considerable delay in payment processing that some people expected never materialized. AP had to find a better way, and they did.

Moving Forward

They shouldn’t stop there. AP organizations should seize the moment to [bring in technology partners](#) to automate the entire payment workflow, address the growing [fraud and security risks](#) associated with ACH payments, and ensure the resiliency of payment workflows in a remote work world. They should be looking to automate invoice ingestion and processing and integrate into other transactional systems, eliminating manual work once and for all.

Nobody likes being forced to change, and that’s been perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of the experience we’ve all been living through for the past year. Now that AP teams have proven they have the resiliency and the ability to handle all the

change that was thrust upon them, they should seize the opportunity to become

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

Firm Management • Technology

CPA Practice Advisor is registered with the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) as a sponsor of continuing professional education on the National Registry of CPE Sponsors.

© 2024 Firmworks, LLC. All rights reserved