

# Automating Excel-Based Expense Reporting

## Success Story

Our client is a major manufacturer that produces telecommunications equipment.

### Client Vision

Provide tighter controls, greater consistency, and more efficient approvals for employee expense reporting.

### Challenge

Add controls and consistency while providing flexibility for unit specific business rules.

Maintain familiar Excel spreadsheet reporting mechanism.

### Nobilis Solution

Nobilis Ci - The ProcessWriter  
Nobilis Enterprise V4.01

### Success

Approvals cycle times reduced from weeks to hours.

Currency conversion automated and standardized.

Local managers apply their own business rules.

Automated validations create more accurate reports.

Over \$300,000 saved annually on manpower expenditure.

### Problem

A multinational telecom manufacturer needed to improve its expense reporting process. 50,000 employees worldwide used a standard MS Excel form to report their expenses and a host of problems accompanied the process. First, the diversity of business units meant that each expense form was not approved in the same manner, following the same procedures. Because approvals were based on managers manually approving forms, it was impossible to manage adherence to corporate policies through a centralized process. Clerks in Finance spent countless hours checking reports for adherence to corporate standards and manually routing mistakes and issues back to the issuer and the associated manager for resubmission and approval.

“Nobilis allowed us to achieve the controls we needed, while keeping the familiar Excel spreadsheet that employees already knew. There was no training required and the system was implemented without skipping a beat.”

Likewise, given the global nature of the business, most expense reporting encountered the need to convert currencies from travel across multiple countries into the currency of the country of reporting origin. Because the process was Excel based, there was no central, consistent currency conversion methodology that could be standardized and controlled.

In the end, because of these issues, results were untimely and numbers were often suspect.

### Solution

The company needed to solve these issues of inefficiency and bloated cycle time, as well as the lack of financial consistency, but it did not want to give up its familiar Excel based form. Rather than implement a new system and require the entire company to and adapt to it, they turned to a solution from Nobilis that would solve their problems, but allow them to continue using their familiar Excel based form.

The Nobilis platform enabled a business manager in Finance to leverage their familiar Excel form as the means of entering expense information, but wrap process automation around it to enterprise-enable the required routing, controls, and approvals. When a user needed to fill out an expense report, they would start an instance of the process and be presented with the Excel form as the entry mechanism. Once they submitted the form, the process would route the report for approval based upon any hierarchy of rules determined by the corporate finance department and the local business unit in question. These included such rules as approvals required for total expenses or for exceeding certain thresholds on line items. All of these rules could be adjusted and maintained by the appropriate business manager without requiring the intervention of IT. Once approved, the data from each report would be automatically deposited into a database for reporting purposes.

In addition, the company used Nobilis components that came out of the box to leverage a web service for currency conversion. Using Nobilis, the company's IT department was able to search a UDDI directory, provision the desired currency conversion service for use within a Nobilis process, manage the business model for interaction with the service, and monitor its usage on an ongoing basis. The business manager tasked with controlling the expense reporting process was able to treat that web service, which had been exposed to him by IT, as he would any other component within the Nobilis system. When he came to the step in the process to insert currency conversion, he simply dragged and dropped the web service into the workflow and configured its usage for that process. When users started the expense reporting process, they would specify the currencies requiring conversion. When the user was presented with the form, the appropriate conversion rates would be drawn from the service and the totals on the sheet would automatically reflect the proper conversion.

## Results

Today, Nobilis has dramatically improved the efficiency and timeliness of the expense reporting process and the accuracy and consistency of the end numbers. Because the Nobilis system leveraged the original excel form, there was no learning curve for participants to climb in implementing the system. Because the system allows for controls, deadlines, and escalations, cycle times for processing and approving expense reports have dropped from weeks to hours. Because currency conversion is handled by a web service, inconsistent application of rates has been eliminated. In sum, the numbers are more timely, more accurate, and over \$300,000 of manpower annually dedicated to the process has been saved to be better spent elsewhere.

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Nobilis provides the leading self-service application development platform that meets the needs of business users and IT resources alike to automate processes across the enterprise, from everyday work to mission critical activities. Nobilis Ci - the ProcessWriter™ for the business desktop - is the leading self-service application development platform for business users. Nobilis Enterprise provides the scalable and extensible platform required by IT resources to support enterprise level computing.

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