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How Estevez Markets Streamlined Accounts Payable: A Story of AI, Automation, and Accuracy

Estevez Markets is a family-run grocery business with a rich history. Founded by Juan "Morel" Estevez, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, Estevez Markets now owns ten grocery stores across New York and New Jersey, including both Foodtown and Greenway Markets. Morel's son Robin, along with his brothers John and Billy, now continue the family business with a focus on respect, hard work, humility, efficiency, and customer service.

Like many growing businesses, Estevez Markets faced a familiar challenge in their back office: Accounts Payable (AP). Their previously implemented AP automation tool, Bill.com, still required cumbersome manual processes, leading to inefficiencies, errors, and frustration.

Estevez Markets ultimately found a better path forward with Ottimate, transforming their AP process from a manual source of frustration to a streamlined operation that empowers them to focus on what they do best: serving their communities.

The Challenge and Effects on the Business | Frustration with Manual Data Entry and Mistakes

Today, Estevez Markets processes 6000-7000 invoices per month to keep its grocery stores running and its shelves stocked.

Before adopting Ottimate, Estevez Markets used Bill.com to manage their AP, which provided a basic digital alternative to paper-based processes. However, as Estevez Markets grew and the volume of invoices ballooned, the limitations of this previous system became glaringly apparent.

Ultimately, Robin and his AP team found the experience frustrating due to the lack of automation. Invoices can have hundreds of line items or might have readability challenges.

"Some invoices come in nice and clear. Some are handwritten, and some look like the dog ate them"

Robin Estevez
Owner

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Because the system could not handle the line item detail or intelligently process invoices, "a lot of it was manual," Robin said. "We had to do a lot of data entry. We really couldn't map invoices to the right GL code automatically. And while the system would remember the invoice, it didn't remember all of it, and we would have to input invoice information, date, and other details."

Dissatisfaction with this inefficiency wasn't just about wasted time; accuracy, too, was a real problem. Manually inputting data increased the likelihood of human error, such as incorrect spellings. If someone made a typo in the data entry, for example, typing in "Ppesi" instead of "Pepsi," then the system would add "Ppesi" as another vendor.

So, the team spent a lot of time entering data and checking invoices. "Bill.com took a lot of effort, and we would catch a lot more mistakes," said Robin. "The challenge was with accuracy, and we were frustrated having to go back and fix things."

Perhaps most importantly, this lack of accuracy made it challenging to ensure the AP team was paying the correct amounts and maintaining accurate financial records. Seeking a more automated and streamlined solution, the team found Ottimate.

Foodtown Estevez

6000-7000
Number of Invoices Processed per Month

Technology Used:

Google Workspace   zapier   qb

Previous Technology:

bill.com

A Recommendation Leads to a Good Solution

The turning point for Estevez Markets came through a recommendation from a trusted source: another supermarket owner and friend of Robin's, who had already signed up with Ottimate. Hearing about this positive experience piqued Robin's interest, leading him to explore Ottimate as a potential solution.

For Robin, the decision to switch to Ottimate was driven by several key factors, primarily the promise of increased automation and ease of use. He found Ottimate to be a significant improvement in terms of streamlining the AP process. While price was a consideration, particularly given the transaction-based fees they were paying, the positive referral was a key decision factor, along with more advanced technology and features:

Superior, AI-Powered Automation: The core appeal of Ottimate was its ability to accurately automate much of the data entry and processing involved in accounts payable. This advanced AI-based capability promised to reduce the manual effort his team was expending and free them up for more strategic tasks.

Simplified GL Coding, Line Item-Level Processing, and Historical Tracking: In addition to being extremely accurate, Ottimate's AI-powered invoice processing technology is capable of handling complex invoices. Ottimate offers the ability to automatically process individual line items on invoices, map invoices to GL codes, and track historical purchases, features that significantly improved workflow for the Estevez team.

User-Friendly, Searchable Interface:
Robin noted that "Ottimate is more streamlined, easier to use, very easy to search" compared to their previous system.

This intuitive design was crucial for adoption by his team.

Invoice Details	Vendor Setup	Line Items	Accounts Splits	Appro

Bulk Actions | Map Dimensions ☑ | Delete 🗑

	Description	SKU	Unit	QTY	Price
☐	Case of spinach mix	35890	Case	2	$100.00
☐	Apples (3 bags each)	CT5896	Bag	3	$50.00
☐	Case of caesar dressing	CT2356	Case	1	$100.00
				6	

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Ottimate to the Rescue:
A New Automated Process

Today, Estevez Markets has integrated Ottimate into its daily accounts payable process, bringing about notable changes in efficiency and accuracy.
Their new workflow is much more efficient and requires little manual work:

1. Scan Invoices at Store Locations:
The team at each of the 10 Estevez Markets locations scans incoming invoices.

2. Leverage Zapier for Integration:
Estevez Markets utilizes Zapier, a third-party integration tool, to connect with the Google Workspace folder where invoices are scanned. Zapier monitors the folder for new scans and automatically emails these invoices to Ottimate.

3. Process Invoice in Ottimate:
Once the invoices are loaded into Ottimate, the system analyzes them. The few invoices that require human intervention are flagged and routed through predefined approval workflows.

4. Approve Invoices:
Robin and another team member handle invoice approvals.

5. Pay via QuickBooks Online:
Estevez Markets processes payments through its existing accounting software, QuickBooks Online. The payment team prepares checks, and Robin signs them. In the future, they are considering payment processing with Ottimate's payment portal.

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Bringing Confidence to AP:
Ottimate Provides Accuracy and Efficiency

The transition to Ottimate brought immediate improvements, including time and effort savings in processing invoices, improved accuracy by reducing manual errors like typos, and also cost savings. Robin noted that they realized value "fairly quickly, within maybe a week."

The new streamlined process has significantly reduced the manual effort involved in handling invoices. Ottimate's initial invoice transfer and analysis takes less than a day, and their team's subsequent processing is now much faster, taking perhaps an hour per day per store for all invoices.

Robin explains, **"It's saving time, effort and improving the accuracy – that little friction, the frustration of something put in wrong. That does still happen but not as much as it used to."**

He also noted the financial benefits: **"Back in the day with Bill.com, I had an outsourced team that did this manual process, and I don't need them anymore. So it's saving money too."**

While he finds the benefits hard to fully quantify financially, the increased accuracy and reduced need for constant verification provide significant value. "What it does is provide confidence in the accuracy of the invoices going in. Even more than a financial thing, I don't have to waste time to verify 2, 3, 5 times to get it done right."

One of the other key advantages Robin appreciates is the custom reporting that Ottimate has provided. Particularly useful are a custom report for "All Invoices by GL" and the ability to run reports on all COGS, including total spend across COGS accounts across stores or in an individual store. This level of detailed insight allows Estevez Markets to gain a clearer picture of their spending across their various locations and better manage their business.

"I love Ottimate's support team"

Robin Estevez
Owner

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AP is Better With Ottimate

Adopting Ottimate has had a tangible impact on how Estevez Markets manages Accounts Payable, leading to several key benefits:

Time and Effort Savings:
Using advanced AI technology to automate the AP process, Ottimate saves Estevez Markets time and effort by reducing manual data entry.

Improved Accuracy:
The "smart" automation also increases accuracy in invoice processing, reducing the frustration of errors and the need for rework.

Cost Savings:
In addition to saving the in-house team time they can now spend on more strategic projects, Robin realized that Ottimate indirectly saved money by reducing the need to pay for manual data entry.

Increased Confidence:
Ottimate provides more confidence in the accuracy of invoices and payments.

Better Visibility and Control:
Ottimate provides a central platform for managing invoices and tracking their status.

Ease of Use and Support:
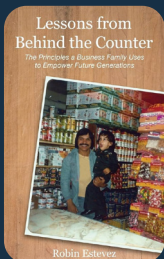Robin highly values Ottimate's ease of use and the excellent support team.

Conclusion:
A Valuable Partnership for Estevez Markets

For Estevez Markets, the decision to partner with Ottimate has proven to be an excellent step towards a more efficient, accurate, and modernized accounts payable process. By automating manual tasks, reducing errors, and saving valuable time and effort, Ottimate has addressed key pain points experienced with their previous system.

Robin highlighted the stark contrast with their previous system: **"It's basically night and day from Ottimate to Bill.com,"** said Robin.

"Improved accuracy ensures we're paying the right amount, getting the right pricing and such. It's all accuracy," he noted. Now, the team has confidence that they are paying the correct amounts and maintaining accurate financial records.

The detailed reporting insights also help Estevez Markets better track spend and manage the business overall. Robin highly values the automation, accuracy, and user-friendliness that Ottimate provides, making it a valuable tool for navigating the complexities of its accounts payable.

To learn about of the amazing story behind Estevez Markets, check out Robin Estevez's book on Amazon, Lessons from Behind the Counter: The Principles a Business Family Uses to Empower Future Generations.