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Cement mills working full steam ahead at Holcim

TESTIMONIAL

Electronic invoicing: a real doddle thanks to eInvoice

E-business. It's a term that resonates all the louder in today's electronic age. So many companies have now jumped on the *e-business bandwagon*. Including Holcim. But e-business is no vague notion for this international cement company with seven locations in Belgium. Because Holcim is an keen user of Isabel eInvoice for its electronic billing.

Tom de Sutter, administrative and financial manager cement sales: "Holcim's aim is to keep the entire process of ordering, invoicing and payment as paperless as possible. Now it can, thanks to Isabel eInvoice."

Tom de Sutter, the administrative and financial manager for cement sales at Holcim, knows Isabel eInvoice like the back of his hand. And he is more than happy to lift the veil on how the system saves time for him. "Holcim is a worldwide company that specialises in the production of concrete, aggregates and cement, with particular emphasis on the latter. The company employs a total of around ninety thousand people in seventy countries, with eight hundred of them earning their bread and butter in Belgium. So, as you can see, we are a large company and have become even bigger in recent years. Which is why we are always looking for ways of making our organisation more efficient. And Isabel eInvoice is one way that helps us to do just that."

Paperless process

Tom de Sutter has been working with eInvoice since March 2006 and neither he nor Holcim's customers have the slightest regret: "We looked carefully at a number of different electronic invoicing solutions," he points out. "But one by one the choice came back to eInvoice. Why? Because it is a very user-friendly system. And because most of the large companies in Belgium are familiar with the Isabel software. Our customer base is made up mainly of companies like that. So it was fairly straightforward to make the switch to eInvoice."

"In the initial phase, those of our customers who also worked with Isabel – about half of our client base – received both a paper invoice and its electronic equivalent," he says. "We weaned them totally off the paper version at the beginning of May 2006. Successfully, too: out of 250 customers, just 10 pulled out. But the financial benefit of making the move to electronic invoicing was not the clincher in our decision. So why did we get started with eInvoice? Because Holcim is also very focused on e-business. About a third of our customers already place their orders totally online. We applaud that, because our aim is to keep the entire process of ordering, invoicing and payment as paperless as possible." "The big benefit of working electronically is that everything can be done so quickly," continues Mr de Sutter. "There are still a few transactions for which an electronic invoice is not appropriate, though. But once you know which ones they are, everything runs like clockwork. My staff creates a file in our accounting system and import it

into Isabel. Then I link it to the customer's Isabel address and sign it with my smart card. One more click and the file is on its way to the customer. Electronic invoices reach the recipient the same day. So the customer can view and pay them immediately."

'An electronic invoice reaches the customer the same day.'

Interactive invoice

Because eInvoice suits Holcim and its customers so well, the company now intends to take it a step further and make the process even more professional. "We are looking for a partner to outsource our invoicing to," he explains. "We want to automate our billing even further so that it becomes a real back-office process. Because no matter how user-friendly eInvoice may be, our current set-up still requires some manual operations. And they take up time."
Holcim's aim is to get round this obstacle by handing its electronic invoicing over to an outside partner. Which also generates other benefits. Such as ways of enhancing the BMF format – the general standard for electronic invoices laid down by the Federal Government Finance Department – or converting to other formats. "BMF does not allow you to put subtotals in your invoice," says Mr de Sutter, "whereas many customers ask us to do precisely that. And the tight way it is divided up also doesn't leave any room for a personal touch, such as a company logo. As a result, all of the invoices issued by companies that work with Isabel look virtually the same. Which may be great for the computer, but it can sometimes be confusing for the customer."

"But what you can do, though, is add a link to a webpage or PDF file. At the moment, customers can go to our e-business platform and get a PDF version of their paper invoice – which does feature our logo as well as subtotals. In the future, we should be able to add this type of link to every electronic invoice. Having a partner on the outside would also mean they could guide us through the stages of expanding e-invoicing to SMEs by using Zoomit."

SMEs not left out in the cold

What about smaller companies? Is electronic invoicing an inaccessible ideal for SMEs? "For the time being 'only' half of our customers work with Isabel. And, of course, we don't want the other half to be left out in the cold. Which is why we are considering adding Zoomit to our package. By using this Isabel application, we can make electronic documents such as e-invoices available directly to SMEs and private individuals as part of the online banking platform. Its very convenient and user-friendly – and the logical next step for Holcim in our e-business approach," he concludes.

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Would your business like to use Isabel to send out invoices electronically? If so, visit **www.isabel.eu/einvoice** and click on Contact at the bottom of the homepage. We will then contact you shortly afterwards.

Don't know about Zoomit yet?
Visit **www.zoomit.eu** soon and find out.