



Billtrust Q&A

featuring Andrew Bartels
Vice President, Principal Analyst
Forrester Research



Billtrust recently had the opportunity to speak with Andrew Bartels, VP and Principal Analyst at Forrester Research, after he participated in a May 20th 2020 Billtrust webinar as a guest speaker. We asked him some important questions about his views on trends and future outcomes in the field of AR and AR automation:

Question: How do you see the usage of data across the workflow creating value?

“On an individual company basis, the data on the timing and magnitude of outgoing invoices and bills from suppliers to customers and the data on the timing, magnitude, and probability of payment from customers to suppliers can be used in cash flow forecasts and projections. It also contributes to insight on where, when, and how much credit to extend to customers, as well as insight on receivables that may go into arrears and thus collections.

“On an aggregated and anonymized basis, the collective data on invoiced amounts, receivables, and payments can provide insight on overall trends in an industry in terms of purchases, financial flows, and credit risks. Of course, this opportunity can only be realized if the clients of accounts receivable (AR) or accounts payable (AP) invoice automation solutions allow their vendor to have visibility into their data and give permission for the vendor to aggregate that data on an anonymized basis. And the opportunity only becomes valuable if the vendor has a large enough client base in an industry that its aggregated data is a statistically valid sample of overall trends in that industry.”

Question: As organizations move into an integrated platform with behavioral data, what are the future innovations that will deliver a better CX and be more cost-efficient?

“It’s important to distinguish between a better user experience for the AR team in the management of the invoicing process and a better user experience for a user in the customer’s AP department.

“In terms of the former, automating the process for generating and presenting the appropriately formatted invoice to the customer will improve the AR team experience. Equally important, capturing and showing the status of the invoice to the customer will allow the AR team to concentrate on critical issues rather than routine ones.

“In terms of the latter, to the extent that an AR invoice automation vendor can streamline the process for presenting an invoice to the client in its preferred form and format, that will improve the AP department experience with that one supplier. But more important would be if there is an intermediary that can create a similar seamless experience for the AP department’s interaction with all its customers. That intermediary would be a business network of some kind that can work with a variety of AP and AR invoice automation systems.”

Question: How do you think AI is going to transform accounts receivable?

“One area where AI could play a role on the AR side lies in creating more dynamic rules that advance payment notices on which to offer discounts to the customer, which to finance through a lender, and which to factor at a discount. At present, this is a very manual process.

“Another area for AI-based improvements is in the decisioning process for how to address delinquent or partial customer payments, and the process for determining where and how much of a discount to offer to customers for early payment.”

Question: How are companies thinking about business continuity in a post-pandemic environment? What changes will be accelerated?

“The changes of invoice processing in a post-pandemic environment will be minor. AR departments have had to adapt to having many or most employees operate in a work-from-home environment. For companies that had an AR invoice automation solution, this was a relatively smooth transition. The real question is whether this work-from-home mode was a temporary situation facilitated by software-as-a-service AR solutions, by jerry-rigged workarounds, or by a more permanent arrangement that requires more robust solutions. My own view is that most AR departments will return to work-in-office modes, allowing some portion of its workforce to work from home on a sustained basis. That will lead to an acceleration in adoption of AR invoice automation offerings.”

Andrew Bartels primarily contributes to Forrester’s offerings for the CIO. As an analyst, he is a leading expert on tech market trends and sizing, cloud and smart computing technologies, tech budget benchmarks and processes, and tech’s impact on business operations. He also researches the growing customization of tech systems for industry-specific solutions for utilities, energy, government, education, and professional services sectors. He is a thought leader in buy-side technologies and business networks.