

esm PURCHASE



CUSTOMER SUCCESS

Delaware Valley University delivers a more convenient buying experience

ESM Purchase helps buyers make
smarter purchasing decisions



Like other small private colleges across the U.S., Delaware Valley University in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, is always seeking better ways to meet its mission and serve its constituents.

It's why the university froze tuition for the 2020-21 school year in the wake of a pandemic that has forced many families to make hard decisions about where to spend their dollars. And it's why the university opened its unoccupied residence halls to health-care workers on the front lines of the battle against COVID-19 during the spring of 2020.

That spirit of service and innovation extends to the university's procurement practices. At many colleges and universities, the procurement department is often seen as the "office of no," with cumbersome requisition and approval processes that delay purchases and force buyers to jump through hoops. "In the 'before times,'" said William Lyle, purchasing director at DelVal, "we relied on yellow requisition forms filled out by hand. Sometimes we couldn't read the handwriting. Sometimes the account number was wrong. And sometimes it fell behind someone's desk never to be seen again," he said. "Then we'd get the angry phone call," he remembers.



With ESM Purchase, DelVal was able to cut processing time for orders by at least 90 percent.

Delivering Convenience and Compliance

In 2007, DelVal implemented ESM Purchase, a cloud-based solution that provided a new, seamless shopping experience to stakeholders across the university, along with an automated approval process to speed transactions and eliminate bottlenecks. “We are the definition of a very small school. And, with very limited resources, sometimes we have to be creative. ESM has been very helpful in getting us on the right track.”

Bill decided to pilot ESM Purchase with a handful of offices. “That took us about six months,” he recalls. “In retrospect, I don’t think I needed to be so cautious. People loved it. And when we rolled it out across campus, we didn’t hear a single complaint.”

With ESM Purchase, DelVal was able to cut processing time for orders by at least 90 percent. And with a better understanding of who was buying what from whom, Bill had the data he needed to negotiate better contracts with suppliers. Now, buyers across the university can make smarter purchases against those negotiated contracts, greatly reducing “wildcat” spend for things like office supplies or laboratory equipment.

Punchout Catalogs for Every Need

With that insight, Bill was also able to convince some of the university’s preferred vendors to create punchout catalogs for DelVal. “They hesitated,” he said. “They wanted to know whether the effort would be worth it. We were able to tell them exactly how much spend they would realize and so they moved forward, assisted directly by ESM’s supplier enablement team. Since then, we’ve never looked back. It’s a very good relationship for both our vendors and for DelVal,” he said.

Specialized Buying Made Easier

DelVal was founded in 1896 as the National Farm School and while it offers a comprehensive liberal arts curriculum today, it remains committed to innovative programs in agribusiness, environmental sciences, nutrition, and animal, equine, and plant sciences. That, of course, requires specialized buying, especially for essential items that suddenly became scarcer and more expensive during the novel coronavirus in 2020. “We never needed a lot of PPE, but when the pandemic hit us, we couldn’t find those items anywhere—and when we did, they were quite costly,”

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Bill said. In response, the procurement office has been helping departments across campus make bulk purchases. The university is avoiding the costs associated with buying incrementally from multiple vendors and delivering goods faster.

Deep Integration for Efficiency and Insight

Seamless data exchange between the finance and procurement systems drives insight and supports decision making. DeVal is working with Ellucian and ESM to move to a more robust integration between Ellucian Colleague (DeVal’s ERP) and ESM Purchase that will be supported by Ellucian Ethos, an enterprise-wide platform that addresses the need for a more unified operational environment. With their two systems fully integrated, DeVal will be able to accelerate procurement processes to deliver better services.

“With the new Ellucian Ethos integration, we’ll be able to use all of the tools available to us to create seamless data exchange,” Bill said. “We’ll no longer have two sets of vendor lists that we need to maintain in both systems.” Bill is particularly excited to begin using blanket purchase order capabilities that will allow departments to draw down on authorized funds. “With more data being passed back and forth, we’re going to have a much better ability to analyze spend and make better decisions,” Bill said.

A Reliable ROI

When talking to colleagues at other small institutions, Bill said he’s always surprised by institutions that haven’t yet implemented eProcurement tools, considering the advantages.

Time, he said, is one issue. And, it did take some time to transition from those inefficient yellow requisition sheets to a completely automated eProcurement system.

“Once that was done, the upkeep was very easy and very straightforward,” Bill said.

Money, however, is the biggest stumbling point for institutions focused on saving, not spending. If you’re spending nothing on eProcurement now, then signing a contract with ESM is, in theory, spending more, Bill said. New spend always gets push back.

“But it’s a false argument,” he said. “The savings that are attainable—both the soft savings and the hard savings—will outweigh whatever you pay to ESM.”

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