



corcentric™

**Suburban  
Propane®**

# Suburban Propane Powers Up with AP Automation

Energy company saves hours of labor with Cor360 Approval Workflow

## THE BUSINESS

Suburban Propane is a nationwide marketer and distributor of a diverse array of products to meet the energy needs of approximately 1.1 million residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural customers through 668 locations. Headquartered in Whippany, New Jersey, the company has over 90 years of experience specializing in propane, heating oil and refined fuels, as well as the marketing of natural gas and electricity in deregulated markets.

With a network of nearly 200 customer service centers requiring regional approvals for larger expenses, Suburban's Accounts Payable (AP) department was managing approvals and data entry for thousands of invoices each month. While the company had created a "check request system" that enabled each center to enter recurring expenses for smaller amounts directly into the AP system, the majority of those invoices had to be mailed to one of several regional offices. It was a slow and often unreliable process.

"It has the power and flexibility to take you wherever you want to go."

"Our previous system was very manual; at times we would encounter delays in obtaining the approvals required to process invoices," says Helene Fischer, Assistant VP, Accounting Operations.

When Suburban Propane bought the propane division of Inergy LP, it quickly became the third largest US propane distributor by volume. The number of their invoices instantly doubled, and so began Fischer's search for an automated workflow solution to scale responsibly.

## THE EXPERIENCE

While time was of the essence, Fischer was not going to settle. She needed a solution that met a long list of requirements.

The company required a flexible, automated workflow capable of handling their complex, multi-step approval process while allowing invoices to be accepted via regular mail, fax, or email submissions. Other must-haves included a vendor portal that allowed vendors to check invoice status, a 10-year invoice retention period, the capacity to add a customer portal, and built-in functionality that could replace their existing check-request system.

The system also needed to be user-friendly.

"Our customer service reps are incredibly busy, and I had to find the easiest solution for them," Fischer explains. "They have customers walking in with payments, telephones ringing off the hook, and deliveries that need to be routed. I needed something that was visibly the easiest to look at and handle."

### Key Highlights

Up and running in

75 days

16-24k  
documents processed  
per month

94%  
accuracy rate  
in 2 months

As Fischer and the selection committee were weighing their options, Corcentric's Cor360 Approval Workflow emerged as the clear winner. Not only did it meet their requirements, but it also enabled them to get up to speed faster than any other solution they evaluated.

"We were looking at other options, but they weren't "out-of-the-box" solutions. Everything had to be customized from the ground up," Fischer explains.

In the meantime, the AP Department was maxed out, even with the addition of 10 temporary employees. They were putting in long hours, and overtime costs were mounting steadily.

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"I didn't have a year and a half for someone to customize a solution," she says. "Corcentric was amazing; we got up and running in about 75 days, and we got exactly what we wanted."

And that long list of initial requirements? Cor360 Approval Workflow fulfilled those needs while also helping them meet new challenges along the way. For example, Corcentric simplified monthly tax payments by replacing a tedious manual process with a custom program that automatically extracts the required data from tax spreadsheets and uploads it to the system. This saved Fischer's department hours of labor and achieved a 94 percent accuracy rate within two months of deployment.

## THE FUTURE

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To date, Suburban's use of Cor360 Approval Workflow has yielded positive results. All the company's expense payables are processed through the system—between 16,000 and 24,000 documents per month. What's more, Fischer was able to eliminate the ten temporary staff members the company hired during the expansion period and reduce her core staff by 25 percent.

## SUBURBAN PROPANE'S AP SOLUTION 'WISH LIST'

-  **Flexible**
-  **Vendor portal**
-  **10-year invoice retention period**
-  **Customer portal option**
-  **User-friendly**

"It just has that power and flexibility to take you wherever you want to go," says Fischer. "None of the other systems we looked at really had that."

Best of all, people are using Cor360 and loving it. While choosing to automate was a leap of faith, Fischer says everything has worked out better than she could have ever imagined.

"The feedback I've gotten from everyone, including our executive team, has been great," says Fischer. "People go out of their way to stop by and tell me that this was a win-win."



Procurement and Finance Solutions

### ABOUT CORCENTRIC

Corcentric is a leading provider of source-to-pay services and solutions for businesses in the United States and Europe that optimize how they purchase, pay, and get paid. Corcentric's procurement, accounts payable, and accounts receivable solutions empower companies to spend smarter, optimize cash flow, and drive profitability. Since 1996, more than 6,000 customers from the middle market to the Fortune 1000 have used Corcentric to reduce costs and improve working capital. Learn more at [corcentric.com](https://www.corcentric.com).