



White paper | Does your ERP documentation look like this?

Contents

System-based 3

Task-based 7


So what? 10


How to fix it 11

There are two ways to document a computer system:

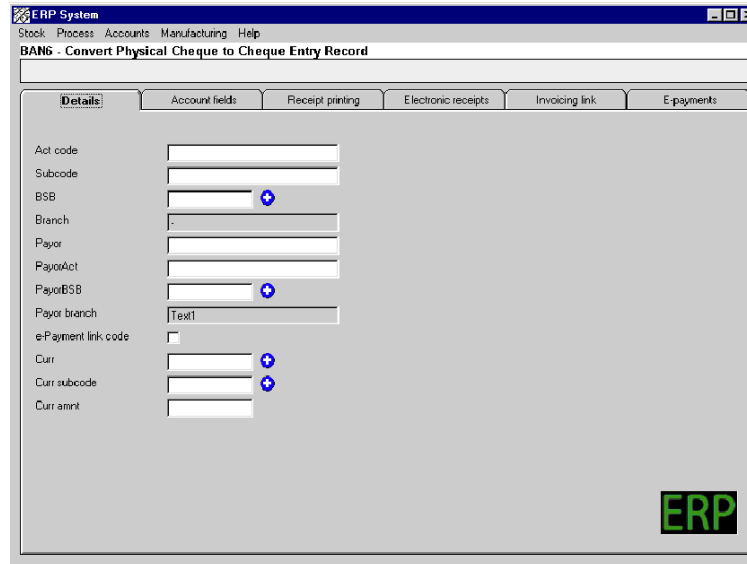
- **system-based:** from the inside out (“here’s what the system does”)
- **task-based:** from the outside in (“here’s how to do your job using the system”)

ERP system documentation is almost all system-based, *and it doesn't work*. Take a look at this (fictional) example:

Copyright ERP Systems CA		Process documentation procedure Title: Convert physical cheque to cheque entry record process	
	Document owner: James Smith	Final	x:\ERP documents\Banking\Process documentation\Final
1.1 Process start point			
Select Convert Physical Cheque to Cheque Entry Record			
Inputs		Physical Cheque Record	
Outputs		Cheque Entry Record	
1.2 Special techniques			
n/a			
1.3 Screen route			
Menu route		option Accounts -> Banking -> Receipts -> Physical cheques -> Cheque entry	
Direct entry process point		BAN6	
Updated on		4/7/03	
Document owner		James Smith	
Version		1.0	
Page		1 of 3	

Copyright ERP Systems CA		Process documentation procedure Title: Convert physical cheque to cheque entry record process		
	Document owner: James Smith	Final	x:\ERP documents\Banking\Process documentation\Final	

1.3.1 Screen titled: “Convert physical cheque to cheque entry record process”




The screenshot shows a software window titled 'ERP System' with a menu bar (Stock, Process, Accounts, Manufacturing, Help) and a title bar 'BANK - Convert Physical Cheque to Cheque Entry Record'. Below the title bar are tabs for 'Details', 'Account fields', 'Receipt printing', 'Electronic receipts', 'Invoicing link', and 'E-payments'. The 'Details' tab is active, showing a form with the following fields:

- Act code: [text box]
- Subcode: [text box]
- BSB: [text box] with a blue plus icon to its right
- Branch: [text box]
- Payor: [text box]
- PayorAct: [text box]
- PayorBSB: [text box] with a blue plus icon to its right
- Payor branch: [text box] containing 'Text1'
- e-Payment link code: [checkbox]
- Curr: [text box] with a blue plus icon to its right
- Curr subcode: [text box] with a blue plus icon to its right
- Curr amnt: [text box]

An 'ERP' logo is visible in the bottom right corner of the window.

Field title	User action required	Values	Comments
Act code	Enter account	Account value	Enter account value
Subcode	if required		
BSB	BSB for acct		
Branch	Branch will display - no user action required		
Payee	Payee entry	Payee act name	Enter payee name
PayorAct	Payor Act entry	Payor account	
PayorBSB	BSB for Payor		
Payor branch	Branch will display - no user action required		
e-Payment link code	If required		
Curr	Curr code	AUD	Do not change for single-currency implementations only
Updated on		4/7/03	
Document owner		James Smith	
Version		1.0	
Page		2 of 3	

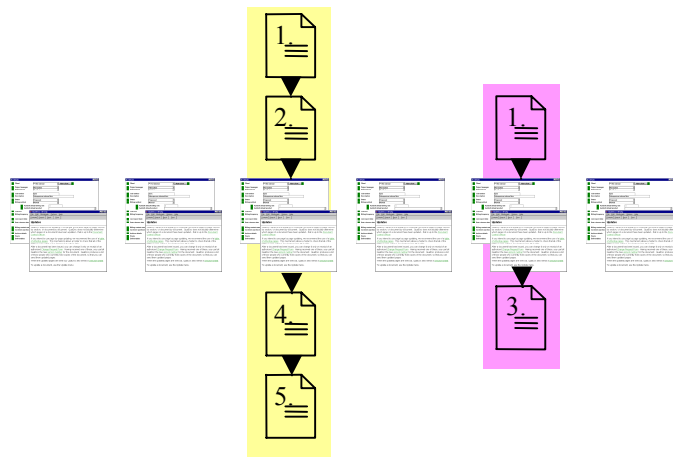
Copyright ERP Systems CA		Process documentation procedure Title: Convert physical cheque to cheque entry record process	
	Document owner: James Smith	Final	x:\ERP documents\Banking\Process documentation\Final
Field title	User action required	Values	Comments
Curr subcode	subcode if required		
Curr amnt	Amount	Currency (see Curr)	N8.2
<p>1.3.2 Press Enter key</p> <p>Select and press the <Enter> key now.</p> <p>1.3.3 Finished process</p> <p>The process is now completed.</p>			
Updated on		4/7/03	
Document owner		James Smith	
Version		1.0	
Page		3 of 3	

This is a typical system-based document - although the title is "Process documentation procedure", the document should really be titled: "All about screen BAN6". It doesn't mention *real* business processes at all.

Documentation of this type looks at the ERP system as a set of discrete transaction types, which make sense in terms of the design of the system. The documentation for each transaction type matches the screen(s) to which it refers:



In reality, people follow business processes which have steps outside the system, and which may touch the system at one or more points during the process:



These *real* business processes are what people do all day. The transaction-based material is what the *ERP system* does all day.

The other thing you'll notice about the ERP documentation example earlier is that it's really badly written:

- it's written in jargon: "Physical cheque record" actually means "cheque"
- it takes three pages to present one page of information
- it's ugly - and ugly documents are less likely to be read
- there is information missing (the blanks in the table on page two)

but most critically:

- **it does not tell the user what to actually do when processing a cheque**

Here's a *task-based* document for the *same business process*:

BA02: How to process a batch of cheques

BA02: How to process a batch of cheques

This procedure tells you how to process a batch of cheques received by mail. It does not include processing of electronic payment notifications - for these, see procedure *FA43: How to process electronic payment notifications*.

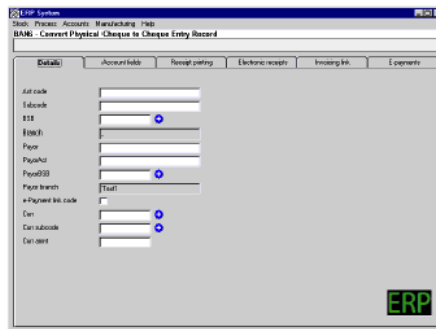
Document owner: James Smith, *Finance Manager*

Performed by: *Accounts Clerk*

Process

1. First, make sure that the account name on each cheque is either "**HCI Consulting**" or "**HCI**". If it is not, then reject the cheque and pass it to the *Accounts Supervisor* for followup.
2. Now write today's date on the back of each cheque.
3. Open ERP and select the menu option:
 - Accounts ->
 - Banking ->
 - Receipts ->
 - Physical cheques ->
 - Cheque entry

... to get screen BAN6: "Convert physical cheque to cheque entry record":



Version 1.0 4/Jan/2033

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1

BA02: How to process a batch of cheques

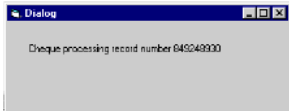
4. Enter the following information from each cheque:

Enter this information from ... into this field on the screen the cheque ...	
Company that paid us	Payor
Account number on cheque	PayorAct
BSB on cheque	PayorBSB
Amount of cheque	Curr amnt

Leave the rest of the fields as they are.

5. Press the **Enter** key.

6. The system will show a box with a reference number for the cheque, like this:



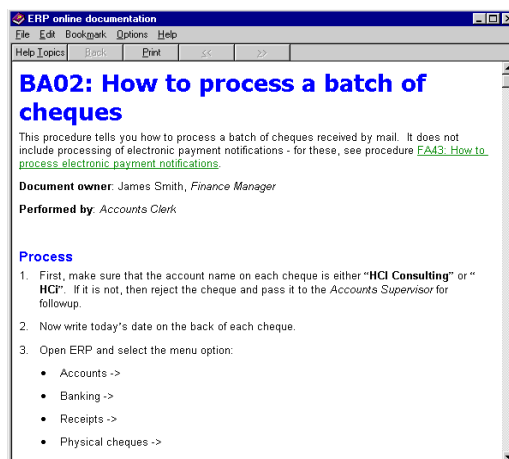
Write this number on the back of the cheque.

7. Repeat these steps for each cheque in the batch.

8. Manually add the amounts on the cheques, and write this on a piece of paper, along with today's date and your name. Wrap the paper around the bundle of cheques, and pass them to the Banking Clerk for banking.

Version 1.0 4/Jan/2033 HCl Consulting 2

Better still, here's an online version of the same document:



ERP online documentation

File Edit Bookmark Options Help

Help Topics Back Print << >>

BA02: How to process a batch of cheques

This procedure tells you how to process a batch of cheques received by mail. It does not include processing of electronic payment notifications - for these, see procedure [FA43: How to process electronic payment notifications](#).

Document owner: James Smith, Finance Manager

Performed by: Accounts Clerk

Process

1. First, make sure that the account name on each cheque is either "HCl Consulting" or "HCl". If it is not, then reject the cheque and pass it to the Accounts Supervisor for followup.
2. Now write today's date on the back of each cheque.
3. Open ERP and select the menu option:
 - Accounts ->
 - Banking ->
 - Receipts ->
 - Physical cheques ->

Key things about this document:

- it's shorter, even though it has a lot more information
- it doesn't use jargon
- it gives *all* of the information you need, but *no more than that*

but most critically:

- **it's written in a real business context, and relates to the job in hand**

Meta Group says the average ERP implementation:

- takes 23 months
- costs US\$15M
- has a **negative** NPV of around US\$1.5M

We know why ERP systems are expensive and late - all software implementations are expensive and late. But why don't they deliver any value to the organisation?

Large amounts are spent on ERP system training when the system is implemented. Sometimes the training is effective, sometimes not. Even when it *is* effective, it's forgotten completely after a few weeks or months.

Users then have to rely on the documentation that the implementation partner left behind when they walked out of the door for the last time.

Often that documentation was produced as a by-product of system design, and was never really fitted to users' needs. Often it's badly written. Often so bad that no-one reads it.

Does this describe your ERP system documentation?

At Hci we have been developing task-based documentation since 1981. We just about wrote the book on it - one of our principals chaired the Standards Australia committee that wrote the Australian software user documentation standard. A standard that has been adopted by ISO as a world standard for how to write good documentation that users can actually use.

We have worked with almost every blue-chip organisation in Australia. They choose their suppliers with care and this is your assurance of the quality of our work:

Computer industry: Aspect, Attache, Austraclear, Baltimore, bullant, CSC, CSIRO, DMR, EDS, eVentures, Fujitsu, GE IT, GEC Marconi, Intergraph, Keycorp, Lucent, Masterpack, Micropay, Peoplesoft, Praxa, Salmat, Sienna, Solution 6, Sun, TechComm, Unisys, Wilcom

Finance, banking and insurance: AMP, ASX, Avco, CGU, CitiBank, Commonwealth Bank, CSFB, First State, GIO, IPAC, Lumley, Mercantile Mutual, MLC, NZI, QBE, Rabobank, RAMS, Royal Sun Alliance, SGE, Swiss Re, Tyndall, Westpac

Telecomms: British Telecom, Cable & Wireless Optus, Heartland, Hong Kong Telecom, Objectif, Optus, Optus Vision, OzEmail, Pacom Bell, Teletech, Telstra, Vodafone

Legal and accounting: Blake Dawson Waldron, CCH, Ernst & Young, Gillis Delaney Brown, Lawpoint, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Softlaw, Woodslane

Utilities: Advance Energy, Energy Australia, NorthPower, Prospect Electricity, Sydney Electricity, USC-MITS

Education: AGSEI, Catholic Schools Office, Macquarie University, NextEd, University of Newcastle, NSW, Sydney

Retail, distribution and transport: B&D, Blue Star Office, Cards etc, Chubb, CityRail, Coca Cola Amatil, David Jones, Freight Corp, Hawker Pacific, James Hardie, Jigsaw, John Fairfax, Liquorland, Mannesmann, McDonalds, NRMA, NSW TAB, P & O Ports, Pasta Pantry, QANTAS, Rail Access, Rail Services Australia, Sabre Pacific, Southern Cross Galileo, SRA, Star City, TNT, Woolworths

Electronics and industrial: Alcatel, Boral, Caltex, Canon, Ciba, Clyde, CSR, EOIFoods, Florafoods, Foxboro-L&N, Grinnell, Hanimex, Honeywell, ITT Flygt, Meadow Lea Foods, Meat & Livestock Australia, NationalPak, NEC, Shimadzu, Sony, Transfield, Tyco, Unilever, Warman, Westfield

Government and related: ABC, ABS, Agriculture, ASC, ATSIK, EPA, Family & Community Services, Health & Family Services, Housing, Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Joint House, Land and Water Conservation, Land Information Centre, Landcom, NSW Fire Brigades, NSW Police, State Revenue, Public Works, RTA, Software Engineering Australia, State Transit, Tourism NSW, Victorian Department of Infrastructure, Water Resources

Health: Baxter Healthcare, Cochlear, Medical Applications, Novotech, Parke Davis, Pfizer, Pharmacia, ResCare, ResMed

We'd like to show you what we can do with your ERP system documentation. Call us to talk further.