



PlanetPress Software Fuels Flexibility for Natural Gas Distributor

As the main distributor of natural gas in Quebec, Gaz Métro serves a hefty 97 percent of the market. Once a business or residential customer is connected for service, their most regular contact with the company is likely to be a monthly bill. All statements must be prepared and printed as efficiently and smoothly as the natural gas service customers receive, because any billing error could send an account to a competitor.

Statements go to over 180,000 commercial and residential accounts, and total billing is approximately two billion dollars (Canadian) per year. The need to support two types of customers - commercial and residential - complicates matters. About 2,400 business accounts receive what Gaz Métro calls SAP billing, while cyclic billing refers to the application that goes to more than 160,000 residential clients. Relationships based on trust with print providers and other vendors are essential to maintaining the highest level of quality in these billing processes.

Easy Editing Is Primary Need

The SAP and cyclic billing cycles share one critical requirement - the need to be changed quickly and easily. *"Our primary need was to edit invoices," explained Jean Gaumond, Invoicing Department Manager. "Previously, bills were coded at the mainframe, and the resulting data was extremely difficult to modify. Just adding one line required changing all the code, and it could take up to a week or two."*

PlanetPress Software from Objectif Lune helps Gaz Métro prepare and distribute statements that meet all requirements, and making changes now could not be easier. Flexibility in modifying the content and layout of invoices was a key reason for selecting PlanetPress Software. The powerful yet user-friendly PlanetPress tools can drive a wide range of variable content documents and route them to the best delivery channel using PlanetPress Watch.

Objectif Lune handles any modifications under a 24/7 service contract. As a result, Gaz Métro saves time and costs by not using in-house staff for the job and can focus those resources on other tasks that drive revenue.

"We gained significantly in flexibility," said Gaumond. "If we need to make changes, we can do that easily within a reasonable time, and that's the biggest benefit. Now it takes just half a day versus two weeks."

The inflexibility of the bill also made it difficult for the Marketing Department. "When Marketing asked to add something to a bill, we had to say no," he said. "Now it is really easy and quick to integrate their ideas."

Personalization Creates More Effective Bills

Via PlanetPress, Gaz Métro can add personalized messages targeted to a particular group of clients, such as announcements about new services and promotions. For more accurate response tracking and fulfillment, barcodes can be added for advertisements and other promotions. Support for conditional printing of data, graphics and pages added to the attraction of PlanetPress.

"We also send letters with bills, depending on the client's profile. We have 21 different types of letters in two languages, English and French, with paragraphs inserted based on the account." Everything is entirely personalized through the PlanetPress platform.

The flexibility of PlanetPress helps boost cross-selling efforts, too. *"We can send different offers and make it more convenient for customers to respond by using forms that are already pre-populated with some of their information," said Gaumond.*

Seamless Integration with SAP

Gaz Métro runs a heavy-duty mainframe-driven invoicing operation using LCDS data streams for printing. The document platform must support a variety of complex output, including statements and billing, variable data documents and MICR check output. The open architecture of PlanetPress allowed Gaz Métro to implement the software without impacting or modifying their existing systems.

The first step was to integrate PlanetPress with the commercial SAP application, but this posed a potential challenge.

"We were short on time because the SAP project was already scheduled," said Gaumond. To ensure that the PlanetPress software would work with the SAP application, Objectif Lune had to personalize the development and work closely with the SAP team. "We gathered data in RDI (raw data information) format and sent it to Objectif Lune. They prepared samples and presented what PlanetPress Suite could do for us, and it was doing exactly what we needed. Furthermore, we were able to print directly to our print provider, and we could also control our forms and print internally as well."

"Every time we need something, the Objectif Lune team is always there for us. They are easy to reach, and we never need to escalate our concerns. They take care of our requests without any complicated procedures or forms to complete. The relation is easy and direct, and that is what we like."

Jean Gaumond
Invoicing Department Manager

Enabling Better Back Up

PlanetPress gave Gaz Métro another important advantage, according to Mr. Gaumond. "Our system back-up, called *Grand Débit SAP*, was at our printer, but we didn't have any internal back up. PlanetPress changed that. If something happens at the printer, such as a device going down, we can print internally on a high-capacity color system using pre-printed color forms."

The ability to create a document and print it as part of a batch or one off gives Gaz Métro many options for generating output when they need it. "In the first four days of the month, we send bills for our 2,400 biggest industrial clients to our printer. The other bills for commercial clients are printed one by one. When we need to print only one bill, we do it internally on our color printer using white paper with a MICR code for tracking."

The cyclic billing application contains more than 160,000 monthly billed residential clients, with an average of 10,000 processed per day. "We transfer the mainframe data internally in RDI format, then we send it to PlanetPress," said Gaumond. Like the SAP billing, the face of the bill is totally editable.

A Better Process for Reprints

Reprints have always been a bottleneck for transaction-based applications, because it's difficult to isolate, route and print just one invoice cost effectively. "In the past, if there were incorrect amounts or if there was a problem with the printing, we were incapable of correcting it in the system," said Gaumond.

With PlanetPress as their document platform, Gaz Métro can make changes and reprint invoices internally on demand. "Now we can make the changes manually and search the bill, edit and reprint it all within one application." Once some columns had shifted, but with PlanetPress as the foundation of the document, "We were able to correct the mistake quickly. We like being able to correct the bill and immediately reprint it internally. We also save changes, which are made on the display of the data and not in the database itself."

The improved reprint capability enhances customer service as well. If a client loses a bill, Gaz Métro can resend a copy by fax, e-mail or post. "The good thing is that when a client calls to say that he lost his bill, we also reproduce the original letter exactly. Any letters are automatically saved with each bill, and everything that was sent the first time can be reprinted."

Web Presentation for Cyber Viewing

PlanetPress Watch lets Gaz Métro automatically route a print stream to any device or location, or for electronic presentation over the web. They only have to design the layout or make a change once, and it appears correctly wherever the document is used.

"We convert all the bills for presentation on a web site so customers can view them. It's still PlanetPress that generates the bill, sends it to the printer, and then sends it to another internal system to make a PDF copy that is posted to the customer's cyber account for immediate viewing," he explained. PlanetPress also generates e-mails to notify customers that their statements are online.

A Responsive Relationship

"As a service company, we have to offer tools adapted to our clients' needs, and the main concern is making it easy for them. We have to be very careful because our image and reputation are on the line," he explained. "Luckily, the way we work with PlanetPress allows us to control our image via the bill and use it to build a positive relationship with all our customers."

The relationship with Objectif Lune is equally valuable. "Every time we need something, the Objectif Lune team is always there for us. They are easy to reach, and we never need to escalate our concerns. They take care of our requests without any complicated procedures or forms to complete. The relation is easy and direct, and that is what we like," said Gaumond.

The Gaz Métro PlanetPress Suite Solution:



PlanetPress for
Document design



PlanetPress Watch for
Process and distribution automation

For more information on our line of products, visit www.objectiflune.com

