

BCMA

Business Credit Management Association

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December 2020

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E~ Credit News



MEET YOUR INSTRUCTOR

MICHAEL DENNIS is a respected business trainer and author. He can be credited for the development of this and future credit, collection and finance serial training programs. Michael has more than 20 years of experience in credit management in various industries; including healthcare, construction and the auto aftermarket. His most recent publications,

80% of collectors wander through the collection process with no clear plan in place. This Webinar will provide a step-by-step process for collectors to use to collect past-due balances quickly.

One goal is to give you an edge in your interactions with delinquent debtors when it comes to competing with other creditor companies for (a) the customer’s attention and (b) for whatever limited funds they have to pay creditors like you. Especially now, it is important that collectors excel when it comes to convincing customers to pay past-due balances sooner rather than later. This

program will make it more likely that you get paid first. This program covers these 7 steps:

- ◇Call preparation
- ◇Appropriate conduct
- ◇Your initial demand for payment
- ◇The common excuses
- ◇The best way to respond to these excuses
- ◇Getting and confirming the customer’s commitment
- ◇The follow up!

PHONE-POWER COLLECTIONS

A WEBINAR

Thursday | December 10, 2020

TIME: 9:00 AM—10:00 AM Central Time

[Register Online](#)

The Association will be closed at noon on Thursday December 24th 2020 and all day Friday December 25th 2020. We will resume normal hours Monday December 28th, 2020.

Please plan accordingly.

The Association will be closed at noon on Thursday December 31st 2020 and all day Friday January 01st, 2021. We will resume normal hours Monday January 4th, 2021.

Please plan accordingly.



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Ron Alba
Howard Precision Metals
Trish Sanders
South Central GWB Co., Inc
Nestor Delvalle
Samuel, Son & co

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Metals & Industrial Suppliers Industry Credit Group
Nestor Delvalle
Samuel, Son & co
Ron Alba
Howard Precision Metals
Wisconsin / Illinois HVAC Industry Credit Group
Trish Sanders
South Central GWB Co., Inc



The below article was originally published in the Credit Research Foundation
2Q 2020 Credit & Financial Management Review

THE STATE OF ORDER-TO-CASH (O2C) IN 2020 – SHOCK, RESILIENCE, RECOVERY

BY: David Popper, Solution Architect at Serrala

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a shock to economies and societies throughout the globe. Do the short-term measures that were taken have a permanent place in the organization? Ask yourself: How well will the business be prepared when the next crisis hits? Can processes be moved easily from on-site to digital and vice versa? Do you have comprehensive process documentation? Do you have the right tools and solutions in place to enable an agile response to the next challenge? This article will address each of these questions.

COVID-19 has triggered an economic crisis of unprecedented scale which has caught many organizations off-guard. According to a recent survey by Accenture, 75% of companies say the coronavirus pandemic has had a negative or strongly negative impact on their businesses. As a result, 55% of the surveyed organizations plan to downgrade their growth outlooks or have already done so. Supply chains have been especially hard hit, with 94% of Fortune 1000 companies stating that their supply chains are suffering from disruptions.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the economic predictions for 2020 by credit reference agency Coface do not look optimistic. Global growth is expected to recede by -1.3%, plunging as many as 68 countries into a recession. World trade is supposed to drop by 4.3% this year and business failures will increase by 25% worldwide. The risk determination by country, provided by Coface, is alarming too - especially for North America and Western Europe, with the United States (+39%) at the top of expected business failures, followed by the United Kingdom (+33%), Spain (+22%), Italy (+18%), France (+15%), and Germany (+11%). Looking at sector risk, automotive, transportation, tourism, hotels, restaurants, leisure, electronics, retail, specialized distributions segments and most of the manufacturing sectors are most affected. On the other hand, telecommunications, utilities, water and sanitation are less affected. Some industries, such as agri-food and pharmaceuticals, might even benefit from the crisis.

Most companies did not have an operating crisis management and business continuity plan that prepared for such a global economic disruption before the crisis hit. Rather, companies have had to be creative and adapt to the rapidly evolving situation on the fly. While ad hoc plans and solutions dominated the first phase of the response, we have now entered a stage in which companies are starting to organize around the “new normal”. Companies are now moving beyond quick fixes to more substantial solutions

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to maintain operational integrity. Simultaneously, organizations are preparing for the “next normal”, anticipating the recovery once the virus has been contained and the economy picks up again. As organizations shift from their initial response to eventual recovery, they are reengineering processes, enhancing digital capabilities, and developing and implementing more resilient business strategies. In this article we will take a look at how finance departments navigate through the initial shock, build resilience in the crisis and prepare to thrive in the recovery – with a special focus on the order-to-cash cycle.

Shock: The Impact of COVID-19 on Order-to-Cash (O2C)

The COVID-19 pandemic has sent shock waves throughout the world, and unlike previous crises, virtually every industry sector and every line of business has felt the impact. The deployment of cash and the movement of liquidity have become unpredictable. Organizations have had to consider multiple factors while managing their business, such as the disease’s progression, government stimulus, mounting debt burden, and the pace of the economic downturn and recovery. How will all this impact the O2C area? We currently see the following developments emerging:

- ◆ **Increase of DSO and customer insolvencies:** Credit insurer Euler Hermes predicts an increase in bankruptcies by 14% in 2020. Even if companies manage to avoid bankruptcy themselves, insolvencies among their customers (or suppliers) will damage their business. Organizations will see more late payments. Receivables-related liquidity will be tied up in unpaid invoices, resulting in higher DSO and less operating cash.
- ◆ **Higher volume of collection cases:** A spike in DSO will translate directly to a higher volume of collection cases. This will put collection teams under a double strain: On the one hand they will have to handle more collection cases and on the other hand they will have to process collections faster, as cash is needed to maintain the business.
- ◆ **Growing number of disputes and deductions:** As customers try to defer payments, there will be an increase in collection cases and dispute and deduction requests. Resolving these disputes in a timely manner can pose a challenge for organizations, especially if different stakeholders such as sales, billing and collections are involved and working remotely due to social distancing requirements. Customer complaints and inefficient internal dispute resolution processes could create a dire situation, preventing your company from getting your cash.
- ◆ **Increasing credit and customer portfolio risk:** Corporations are reacting to the rising level of insolvencies and are drawing credit lines at rates not seen since 2008. Liquidity across the market is at risk. Credit management, therefore, will have to re-evaluate credit policies and carefully monitor credit risk. The last thing you want is more bad debt when cash is already tight.
- ◆ **More potential for fraud and compliance violations:** Times of uncertainty create opportunities for fraudsters – so beware. Although the organization’s focus is on cash and liquidity right now, fraud risk should not be forgotten. Again, if you need to keep control of your cash, you do not want to lose any of it to fraud. The ad hoc measures and quick fixes that were put in place to deal with the initial shock of the coronavirus crisis have the potential to result in internal or external compliance violations. Organizations should ensure that the measures they have taken to manage this crisis comply with all required laws, regulations and codes of conduct.

In a climate of rising insolvencies, economic downturn and tightening liquidity, O2C becomes a top priority. Organizations overwhelmingly seem to understand this and are taking decisive actions in this area. According to a recent survey conducted by a leading international fintech company, organizations are

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currently facing their greatest challenges in O2C, cash visibility and working capital management. Roughly 60% have insufficient transparency into liquidity.

Obviously the first thing you want to do when your liquidity is tightening up is to get a better understanding of the cash circulating in your company. You need access to real-time financial data in a central system or data repository if you want to be able to support critical business decisions, prioritize resources, determine dependencies and consider geographic market differences. If your data is stale, you will need to fill the gaps with manual research and analysis, which consumes time and resources you do not have if you need to make quick and bold decisions.

In O2C, we see that 52% of companies expect difficulties regarding their DSO and 45% view credit risk as a major challenge right now. Both numbers support the previously described impact of COVID-19 on O2C but also demonstrate its importance for finance at the moment. Next to the importance of general cash visibility and transparency, which is at the top of the list, it is noted that receivable management is coming in second and credit management third.

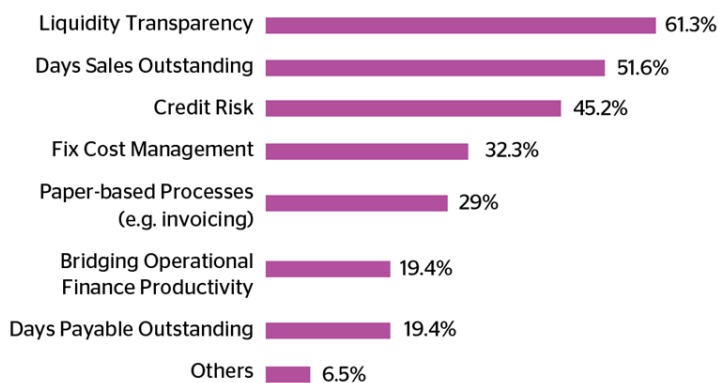
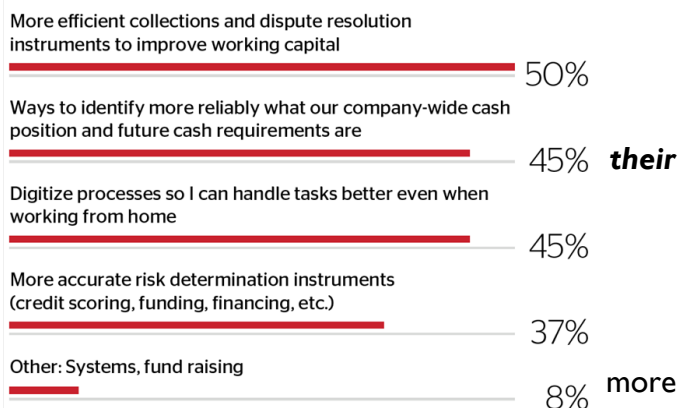


Fig 1: Specific challenges organizations are facing in their finance function / business now

When asked what would help them right now to optimize their financial operations and liquidity, the surveyed companies again pointed towards the O2C space. Fifty percent (50%) of companies indicated they would benefit from more efficient collections and dispute resolution instruments and almost 40% wanted more accurate risk determination tools, including credit scoring but also funding and financing.

Fig 3: What would help organizations to optimize financial operations & liquidity?



These survey results indicate that organizations expect more non- or late-paying customers and complex collection and dispute cases due to the COVID-19 crisis. As liquidity is also tightening up, one must expect that customers will attempt to delay payments to improve their own cash flow. Also, some customers may strategically choose to initiate lengthily dispute and deduction cases, which can delay payments significantly. For customers, this strategy opens up more space to retain their cash, but it prevents you from receiving your cash. Although credit

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policies are not as high a priority as collections at this point in time, organizations do have to re-evaluate these policies and increase their monitoring of portfolio risk. In this very dynamic and unpredictable environment, organizations must expect business failures and insolvencies among their customers at any time. Therefore, they must be even more thorough than usual in their risk assessment and analysis.

To combat the crisis, 54% of organizations have already evaluated and/or implemented cash and liquidity management solutions. Another 46% of organizations have begun to strengthen their collection efforts and 32% have re-evaluated or even tightened their customer credit lines.

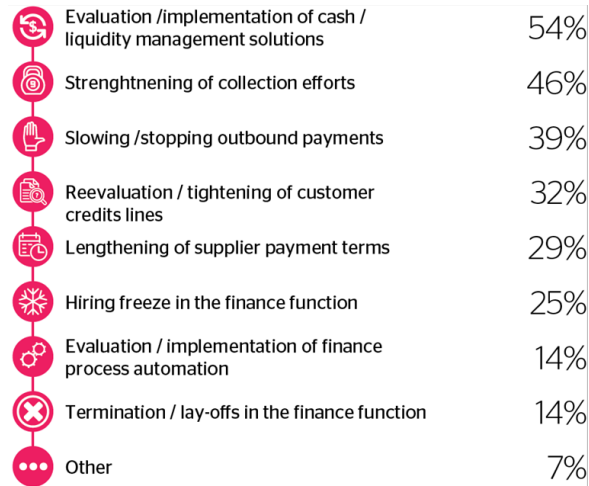
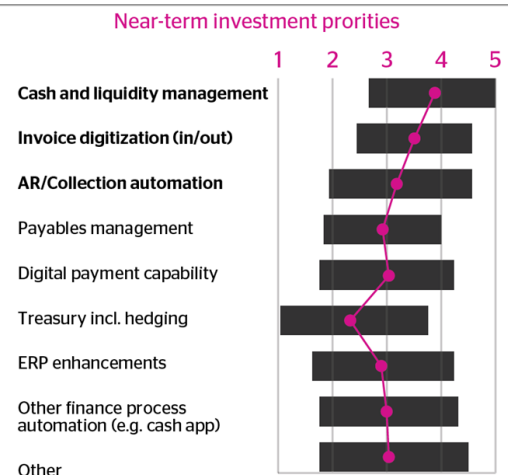


Fig 3: Measures that have already been taken by organizations?

In the near term, organizations reported that investing in cash and liquidity management was their top priority, followed by invoice digitization – including incoming and outgoing invoices.

Accounts receivables and collections automation ranked third in the list of near-term investment priorities. All three choices highlight how important cash and working capital management have become during this crisis. Almost half of the organizations surveyed (42%) said they did not feel that their current cash-related business processes and tools meet their needs during this time. This shows that even though companies expect tightening liquidity, they are still willing to make investments to improve their working capital – in both the short- and the long-term. O2C departments, therefore, need to be alert as organizations are likely to see the greatest benefits in investing in collections, AR, and credit management now to improve their cash flow.

Fig 4: Near-term investment priorities



Resilience: Decisive Action in Times of Crisis

Elaborating on the above-mentioned measures that organizations have already taken due to the coronavirus crisis, we want to further explore the actions that organizations can take to build a more resilient finance department. Following the priorities as they have been laid out in the previously mentioned survey, we want to focus on several short-term measures that can also deliver long-term value to organizations in the

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areas of cash visibility, receivables management and credit.

Know Your Cash Today: Obtain a Full Overview of Your Bank Accounts and Cash Positions

Times like these require a near-real-time insight into corporate cash movements to enable strategic decisions concerning financing, FX hedging and investments. Organizations depend on this information for accurate cash flow forecasting and to manage cash and risk exposures efficiently. However, to get this information you must first know how much cash you have in your bank accounts. Unfortunately, achieving a centralized view of cash can be a challenge if you have a large number of bank accounts. With multiple information sources and bank statement formats, it can be difficult to consolidate cash flow data into a single view quickly. Many companies still do this manually, using spreadsheets. The problem becomes even more difficult if you must consolidate this information from bank accounts across different countries, currencies and communication channels. To remedy this, you need to move away from spreadsheets and use a solution that can automatically pool data from your different cash sources while also handling the various information sources and formats. By automating this process, you will be able to provide your organization with deeper insights into the current and future cash positions and cash flows.

To get the best possible information for managing and forecasting your cash, consider leveraging the different sources of cash flow information that are available in your enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems. For short- and mid-term forecasts, the data generated by your finance operations (accounts receivable (AR) and accounts payable (AP)) are the best sources. This is where you can see how much you have sold and invoiced and how many invoices you must pay. Think about choosing a solution that will let you access these data sources easily and automatically, for different time horizons, so you can gain better insights into current and future cash positions and cash flows. Accessing cash flow data from your ERP system will ensure you have a broad, comprehensive, and up-to-date overview of your current and future cash position and cash flows. Consequently, you can gain deeper insights to improve your days sales outstanding (DSO) and days payables outstanding (DPO) KPIs and take action to optimize your working capital. Most importantly, with the right tools you can sustain financial solvency and profitability for your organization during this crisis and beyond.

Trigger Short-Term Optimizations: Enhance Your Receivables Management

In times of crisis, pursuing overdue payments from customers can be quite challenging without damaging business relations. Having a set of clear and standardized collection strategies based on industry best practices are the best way to ensure the successful collection of debt. But be prepared to be more flexible with your customers during a crisis. They will be suffering from liquidity shortages as well, so keep that in mind when you look for ways to get paid. Consider offering payment plans and deferred payments, or working with external resources, such as collection agencies and attorneys. Also, be prepared for customer bankruptcies. Document everything during the collections process and keep everyone involved on the same page.

Negotiate flexible payment plans that work for both you and your customer. Obtain required approvals as necessary and have the agreement signed by your customer. Store the signed agreement in a central place that is accessible to all stakeholders and stipulate the consequences of non-compliance with the agreement. If you must manage deferred payments, make sure you have a company policy on how to deal with pushback from customers on payment terms. Also, properly document relevant information if you extend terms. You should have one single source of truth – a central repository for your customer- and collections-relevant information: master data, including contact directory; customer communications and calls; payment commitments and repayment arrangements; signed agreements and any internal workflow-related information.

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Implement automatic reminders for payment deadlines, installment plans and re-negotiated invoice due dates. Keep track of any follow-ups with collection agencies or attorneys, as well as any deadlines related to managing customer bankruptcy claims. Do not forget to keep an eye on any other follow-ups required by collectors. Assign and re-assign responsibilities, as required, and analyze the collection team's performance. For the sake of simplicity and consistency, standardize your communication and correspondence templates, such as explanations of payment plans, replies to terms pushback, and communications with collection agencies and attorneys. Make sure these templates can be easily modified by key stakeholders. Finally, be sure to preserve customer relations by showing empathy. Demonstrate that you understand your customer's situation and keep the tone of your correspondence constructive at all times. Keeping all the relevant customer and collections information in one place will ensure transparency for everyone involved.

Once you have ensured your customers have paid, you should ensure your reconciliation process is as efficient as possible. That is why you should not only improve your collection efforts, but your cash application processes as well. Process flaws such as time-consuming, complex or repetitive tasks, or delays in receiving or processing data can be amplified during times of crisis. Employees need full transparency into processes and should have solutions that help them focus on the important tasks at hand. They should not waste time performing manual data collection tasks. Employees or outsourced staff need access to solutions that provide this transparency and that will let them perform their tasks securely from home. Also, document your processes completely so that important process knowledge will not be lost due to possible layoffs or other issues caused by the crisis.

To reduce risks in your reconciliation process, organizations should aim to follow best practices for collecting inbound bank and Payment Service Provider (PSP) data. Start by automating the collection of important bank and accounting data. Automation will enable employees to focus on processing that information as quickly as possible. Next, reduce the number of banks and PSPs, and ensure you have the right tools in place to flexibly connect to the various banks, portals, PSPs and e-mail inboxes required. These tools should be able to standardize the multiple information formats and convert and optimize country specific or payment type specific formats. Finally, centralize and standardize the processes around data collection to make sure the entire process is robust and transparent and not dependent on specialized knowledge of individual staff members.

Manage Risk: Build a Resilient Credit Management

Against the backdrop of a crisis as grave as COVID-19, you will likely need to redesign your Know Your Customer (KYC) processes. After all, credit managers will be faced with assessing the increased credit risk caused by the pandemic. During this crisis, a customer's past payment performance or financials are no longer a reliable indicator of credit risk. Customer portfolios, therefore, should be reviewed more frequently than in the past. You should also look to take ownership of credit related matters within the credit department and build new reports with other internal stakeholders. Consider using new work approaches and collateral options for weaker customers. Work with a credit scoring methodology and ensure solid reporting is available to your stakeholders at anytime, anywhere. Internal stakeholders should have access to relevant and useful information sources, be able to analyze and capture data in a meaningful and structured way and be able to share any relevant information with other stakeholders. Re-define the organization's credit standards if necessary and ensure that credit managers adhere to the policy and enforce it with customers. Adjust internal processes where needed and review and update the policy continuously. The policy should be made available to other internal stakeholders. As it is more efficient to

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work with one source of truth, automate updates from all external information sources, use a common score-card methodology, and obtain credit insurance where possible.

Recovery: Building Towards the Next Normal

In addition to these process-oriented suggestions, here is some behavioral advice that could have a positive impact on your business culture during this time. As we adapt to new ways of working and new at-home work environments, a new mind set is arising. Some changes that were necessary to ensure business continuity now, might prove to be valuable in the future as well.

- ◆ **Agile decision-making:** During a crisis, sometimes prompt and decisive action is required, even when you do not have perfect information or data at hand. As this crisis has shown, taking an agile decision-making approach, including some trial and error, can be useful if it is done within certain parameters. This is especially true if doing nothing or taking too much time to act could cause more damage. As there will be many unknowns in the weeks and months ahead, decision makers will have to accept that they might have to act with imperfect information. Investing into solutions that provide greater cash visibility, global transparency and more reliable O2C processing now, will enable you to embrace a more agile mindset during this time. Your cash flow data and hence your decision-making will be better because you will have the information you need at hand. With regular reporting and thorough reviews, supported by a functioning cash visibility infrastructure, it will be possible to quickly adapt your processes based on lessons learned.
- ◆ **Empower team members:** To succeed in a highly decentralized working environment, leaders should empower team members and encourage them to take the initiative to improve processes. By distributing decision-making rights at different levels of the company, your team will be able to share their ideas and suggest new approaches to addressing your business needs. Be sure to clarify the objectives when giving your team more flexibility and local autonomy for process improvements and ensure that everybody knows the guardrails within which they operate.
- ◆ **Anticipate customer behavior:** The current crisis could have long-term effects on customer behavior. For instance, consumers might be more reluctant to spend money or go into physical stores for some time, even after social distancing measures are lifted. Daily routines could be different after the crisis and customers may remain cautious about protecting their health. How could this impact your business model if your customer behavior shifts permanently? Try to anticipate and analyze if and how COVID-19 has influenced your customers' experiences, expectations and behaviors, and how digital engagement could help to meet those customers' needs.
- ◆ **Invest in the right technology:** As social distancing becomes normal, the importance of digital capabilities will increase – at work and when interacting with clients. Digital transformation will most likely pick up strongly in the coming months and years. Spending on cloud technology and data center improvements are expected to increase. Customer onboarding, interactions and services might become more digital. Related processes, communications and reporting will also transform thanks to digital technology. This technology will shape the future of work. Many business units and functions will evaluate the practices invented during this crisis and analyze how they could be part of a modern and future-oriented working environment.

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As we move from this crisis into recovery, leaders and decisionmakers will have to shift their mindset from the immediate fallout and focus on tomorrow. The many market and societal shifts caused by COVID-19 and the substantial uncertainties that have emerged need to be navigated carefully, but companies also need to be prepared to seize the opportunities for change and growth.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a shock to economies and societies throughout the globe. It is too early to say whether this experience will be a catalyst for innovation and positive change or not. The measures that organizations took quickly to improve business resilience at the start of the crisis should be reviewed. Do the short-term measures that were taken have a permanent place in the organization? Ask yourself: How well will the business be prepared when the next crisis hits? Can processes be moved easily from on-site to digital and vice versa? Do you have comprehensive process documentation? Do you have the right tools and solutions in place to enable an agile response to the next challenge?

In the finance department, O2C processes and cash visibility become extremely important during times of economic crisis. Collections managers and credit experts will play an important role in ensuring liquidity during this time and could possibly be the last line of defense in the organization's survival. Leaders will have to make smart decisions regarding cash. Reconsider funds and savings and choose spending and investments wisely. Now is the time to focus on taking measures that will provide both an immediate and a long-term positive effect on cash flows and working capital. By bringing together processes, technology and company cultures, you can get through the current crisis and set your company up to thrive in the next recovery.

About the Author:

David Popper is a Solutions Architect for the Serrala FS² Credit and FS² Collections suite. He joined the company in June 2018. David has extensive credit and collections experience at all levels. Starting as a collector in 2011, he worked through the ranks to credit and collections manager. In his last position prior to joining Serrala, David was responsible for 9 countries, 18 legal entities and an AR of EUR 180 Million. Under David there were 3 supervisors and a total of 17 employees, spread across 4 countries: United Kingdom, Netherlands, Germany & India. David led his teams through various ERP and company integrations. The approach he has taken with his team has always been to put the client first, ensuring a strong balance between collection activities and customer satisfaction.

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Per hour to handle commercial mediation services to assist parties in coming to a negotiated resolution to what otherwise might be an irreparable relationship and an un-reconcilable dispute. There will be a minimum charge (up to four (4) hours of time on a typical mediation), plus any out of pocket or meeting coordination expenses.

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Available on an hourly or flat fee basis. Initial consultation to review and discuss a firm's objectives, policies, procedures, accounts receivable portfolio and risk assessment techniques – provided at no charge. Custom plan(s) developed and provided that employs best practices for maximum effectiveness, proper risk analysis due diligence and in keeping with company policy and objectives. Follow up audit and maintenance plan services available as well to ensure policies established are put into practice and being adhered to.

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Forwarding Service – Wisconsin Credit Association Commercial Recovery Services Departments affiliation with attorneys nationwide can expedite any necessary legal action that may be required to recover your receivables.

Contingent Rate Guarantees – Wisconsin Credit Association Commercial Recovery Services Department will guarantee the same contingency rate percentage whether we recover your receivable or our network of attorneys causes a recovery.

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UPCOMING INDUSTRY CREDIT GROUP MEETINGS

DECEMBER 8, 2020

Regional Paper & Packaging Industry Credit Group
Book of Reports Only

Fine Paper/Graphic Arts Industry Credit Group
Book of Reports Only

DECEMBER 9, 2020

Plumbing & Heating Industry Credit Group
Teleconference Call

DECEMBER 11, 2020

Electrical Suppliers Industry Credit Group
Teleconference Call

DECEMBER 15, 2020

Building & Construction Materials Credit Group
Teleconference Call

WI/IL HVAC Industry Credit Group
Teleconference Call

DECEMBER 16, 2020

Food Service Supply Hospitality & Food Suppliers
Industry Credit Groups
Teleconference Call

Minnesota Electrical Suppliers Credit Group
Teleconference Call



DECEMBER 17, 2020

Construction Industries Credit Group
Teleconference Call

DECEMBER 18, 2020

IL Fine Paper Industry Credit Group
Teleconference Call

DECEMBER 21, 2020

Western Electrical Suppliers Industry Credit Group
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Education Events

December 10, 2020

[“Phone-Power Collections” Webinar](#)

January 14, 2021

[“What Credit Pros Should Do and Should Not Do During This Recession and Pandemic ” Webinar](#)

March 2021

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