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INTRODUCTION

At a recent trade show, a booth visitor complained that his IT team was spending an alarming amount of time updating their custom built EDI system to accommodate new customer and vendor requirements.

We hear many similar stories about the excessive amount of time that companies must spend in order to maintain their custom-coded EDI systems. However, there is a solution.

THE BUSINESS CHALLENGE

In order to combat this problem, a prominent mid-size Canadian distributor recently replaced their five-year-old custom-coded EDI solution with a much more versatile, fully-functional, packaged solution that they purchased from ACOM. An international airline also recently purchased ACOM’s packaged solution, to tackle problems in its cargo operations (which were not manageable by an earlier EDI solution that had been “custom-built” by a contractor).

Both companies found that their requirements had outgrown their custom-built EDI solutions’ flexibility. At least two years ago, the distributor experienced delays in customer service because its custom solution lacked audit capabilities at the document level; information could only be retrieved with extensive programming. Similarly, the airline discovered that the rigidity of its custom solution – developed primarily to serve its largest cargo customer, the U.S Postal Service – did not allow them to make quick and easy modifications. These changes were necessary in order to keep pace with the postal service’s requirements, but modifications to their custom-built EDI solution were very difficult, time-consuming and expensive.

Many of the large-scale flat-file custom solutions no longer have the functionality to deal with today’s rapid-fire e-commerce world. For example, certain major customers modify their standards regularly, which require excessive maintenance. Many of their trading partners who have custom-built EDI solutions often must hire IT contractors to build these new standards into their solutions, at expensive professional services rates (and questionable future availability).

PERSPECTIVE

For companies who are stuck with an older generation of e-commerce, or companies who are considering their first EDI initiatives, it is important for them to realize that translation and communication technologies have evolved. The power needed to benefit from today’s ever-changing electronic transaction environment is not only available, it is affordable.

For example, you can purchase a fully-functional EDI solution from ACOM that enables files of any type to be uploaded directly to the database tables of virtually any SQL or ODBC compliant back-office platform. This means that whether the transaction data arrives as an EDI file, XML file, web form or even a proprietary flat file, this data can be received, translated, and placed directly into the application for processing.

Communications can also be similarly flexible, accommodating virtually any combination of VANs, VPNs, direct connects, the Internet, the World Wide Web, and email networks. For example, ACOM’s web forms solution can extend the e-business alternative to any customer or vendor that wishes to participate, as well as provide yet another means for easy acceptance and uploading of vital data into the user’s application. Meanwhile, interaction between the solutions’ various elements can enable imaginative ways to monitor, audit and manage the system and document flow.

CONCLUSION

As history has shown, when technology matures, prices often fall, and functionality increases. You can still spend millions of dollars on a custom built system, but most companies looking for a B2B e-commerce solution, will find that the better alternative is to “Buy, Don’t Build.” A fully-functional packaged solution can be implemented faster, can offer greater flexibility, and provides little or no additional strain on the budget than having your IT department start from scratch.

Finally, purchasing from a reputable, experienced vendor can offer “peace of mind,” especially if they provide the security of a no-risk guarantee.