

### THE BACKGROUND

CanWel Distribution Ltd. is one of Canada's leading building materials distributors, representing more than 15,000 brand name and private label building products, and servicing the retail and industrial markets, through five regional distribution centers across Canada. Several years ago they determined it was time to move to electronic data interchange (EDI) for transactions with high-volume suppliers and customers whenever possible.

Vancouver-headquartered CanWel implemented a custom-coded EDI extract solution (Rexx) in conjunction with J.D. Edwards' (JDE's) OneWorld EDI System 47 and an EDI Mapper Utility, approximately five years ago, for transactions with its dozen or so largest trading partners. According to IT Vice President Malcolm McKinnon, it has remained in a continual state of migration ever since, with the company arduously coaxing out more and more capability in response to ever-greater requirements.

### THE PROBLEM – COPING WITH VOLUME & COMPLEXITY

About two years ago, it appeared that the system was about to hit the wall. Volume was growing and many of its processes were requiring manual intervention – precisely the situation EDI intends to avoid.

The system typically handled some 150,000-200,000 EDI invoices annually, in addition to thousands of purchase orders and acknowledgements, but there was little or no interaction between key processes. Each new EDI trading partner had to be set up manually to communicate with the EDI tables of the company's JDE's OneWorld ERP software.

“Our customer service options and our management measurement practices were seriously limited,” he says. “It became apparent that we had to replace the original system with one that could provide us with the automation, translation capabilities, communications flexibility and navigation services that would assure effective processes and high level customer service.”

A particularly critical deficiency of the custom-coded system was the inability to access individual documents within the system without engaging in extensive new coding. There was a great deal of business logic in the system, but it became impossible to make it all fit together as the business grew larger and more complex, McKinnon says. There was no archiving and once a document had been purged, it was simply gone.

In a common situation, McKinnon says, a customer would call and say that a certain document had not been received.

“We could only say that we thought that it had, but couldn't be sure, so we would resend it. With EZConnect we have document-level auditing and we can track orders document-by-document and by date. We can say, ‘you got it, and here's your purchase order acknowledgment’.”

Beyond the day-to-day customer service issues involved in the custom-coded solution, the IT group increasingly had perceived new and different communications and translation demands coming from the marketplace. They concluded that in order for CanWel to remain competitive, the company had to be able to accommodate demands relating to how documents were exchanged and how they were formatted.

“Some customers wanted the company to process their EDI transactions through standard external transports, while others wanted us to accept their EDI via email, FTP and the like,” McKinnon says. “This presented us with yet another set of concerns that the hard-coded system could not accommodate. It lacked both the communications and translation flexibility to perform the necessary conversions. We were limited to the use of a VAN.”

By June 2002, CanWel had solved its problem, completely reversing the situation with its simultaneous rollout of the latest version of JDE's OneWorld ERP software and the EZConnect EDI/XML translation and connectivity software suite from ACOM Solutions, Inc.

### THE SOLUTION – WHY ACOM?

McKinnon and his staff began searching the worldwide web for possible solutions, with three primary criteria in mind:

- Document level auditing
- Flexibility in receipt and transmission of transactions
- Price

“We were aware that many of the capabilities we were looking for could be found in large-scale, multi-million dollar EDI solutions, but we were not prepared for that kind of expenditure,” McKinnon says. “We examined about five alternatives and ACOM's EZConnect EDI/XML solution emerged as the clear price performance winner, able to satisfy all of our requirements at a price the company could afford.”

Moreover, ACOM's staff came across as extremely friendly and interested in our project, and we immediately sensed that we could develop a true partnership. They genuinely wanted us to win with their product. Their attitudes, skill and support were truly impressive.”

ACOM's modular suite of eCommerce applications and integration tools enable automated data translation and

connectivity between businesses and their trading partners, as well as among various entities within user organizations:

- Uniquely, the **EZConnect** eCommerce engine supports many different data standards, including all U.S. and international EDI standards (X12 &-EDIFACT), as well as all Internet (XML) standards and extensions. Built around SQL relational database technology, it integrates directly with back-office applications such as J.D. Edwards (JDE) via an ODBC connection, requiring no intermediate flat file conversions.
- ACOM's **EZWebForms** extends B2B eBusiness capabilities to 100 percent of a company's trading partners -- even those without EDI solutions -- through use of web-posted secure business documents that can be accessed and utilized by means of a browser via the Internet.

## THE IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of EZConnect was very straightforward, says Lisa Coulter, who was assigned to the task. Prior to installation, she notified all of the company's EDI trading partners that a change would be made. At the time of installation, a Professional Services expert from ACOM came to Vancouver to oversee the installation and to initiate Coulter into the implementation process.

"It was very straightforward," she says. "He showed me how to map new trading partners and how to make changes, and I took it from there."

The new mapping profiles for each trading partner were based on the old mapping profiles from the custom-coded system. It was mainly a case of identifying the fields to extract and entering them within the EZConnect mapping profile. In most cases, Coulter was able to extract data from existing, already populated tables from within JDE's OneWorld. She then performed calculations within EZConnect to format data. The testing process with trading partners was easy and direct: Coulter simply sent the mapped transactions from the custom-coded system, re-extracted the data with EZConnect, compared the differences and made any necessary adjustments. For new trading partners, she is usually able to copy an existing map -- one that closely matches the new trading partner's specifications -- and add or delete specific fields. To date, Coulter has implemented several ANSI X12 EDI documents: 810 (invoice), 850 (purchase order), 855 (acknowledgement) and 823 (lockbox). Purchase orders accommodate both inbound and outbound flow.

Coming soon will be the implementation of EZWebForms, which CanWel purchased as part of the ACOM Total eCommerce Solution. EZWebForms will support the EDI initiative in two ways, McKinnon says. First, by posting interactive forms on the worldwide web, CanWel effectively can extend its availability as a customer to any company -- even those without EDI capabilities -- that wants to participate as a trading partner. Second, it will provide yet another efficient means of inputting data to the EZConnect system. EZConnect will access completed EZWebForms, with the data automatically translated and uploaded to the JDE system for further processing.

"We have many good ideas as to how we can use EZWebForms to our advantage, but we need user participation," McKinnon says. "These forms can be valuable to customers, reps and suppliers and since the posted forms can upload a file from a predetermined format, most of the manual activity can be eliminated. As we develop more information as to how trading partners wish to use them, we will create and post the forms."

## SUCCESS!

CanWel expects numerous positive effects from the EZConnect EDI/XML and J.D. Edwards combination, since EZConnect's open-standards support allows access directly into the native J.D. Edwards EDI tables.

"We were looking for a way to do business better, and we will probably be able to reduce our VAN costs now, at the same time we are providing faster and more flexible service to our customers," McKinnon says. "For example, we now have document-level auditing, so we can track transaction status at any time. We have not been required to make major changes in existing procedures, but some may change because of the increased capability of the new solution. Moreover, EZConnect provides the flexibility to accommodate a wide range of e-commerce issues, such as changes within the JDE interfaces, or in trading partner technology, as well as others that today we have not yet envisioned."

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