Mitchell Fabrics Finds a Single-Source Provider for Everything EDI - NAV Case Study

Their Challenge

Mitchell Fabrics serves large customers, including JC Penney, JoAnn Fabric & Craft Stores, and others, that mandate EDI to expedite the acquisition of product samples and orders. Having just deployed Microsoft Dynamics NAV, it was critical to implement an EDI solution with a low Total Cost of Ownership that would work most efficiently with their new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software.

Bringing Multi-Manufacturing Processes Under One Roof

Over the past 15 years of continuous growth, Steiner Enterprises, Inc. has helped clients become more competitive by responding promptly to accelerating changes in the marketplace. Steiner Enterprises acquired Mitchell Fabrics, which manufactures and sells textile fabrics for garment, home furnishing, automotive and craft applications. With the acquisition, Steiner Enterprises realized Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) was not only a necessity, but a requirement for doing business with their customers.

Support, Ongoing Costs and Whether To Embed or Not to Embed

As the Mitchell team began their discovery process, they quickly learned how diverse the available technology, service, and pricing models could be.

It became immediately apparent that some solution providers did not provide direct support and service. Answers to EDI and Microsoft Dynamics NAV functionality questions took time and required multiple organizations to provide the answers. In some cases, it took days to get an answer to basic questions which naturally raised alarms about their options when they had emergency production issues.

Another key decision, technology approach, boiled down to heavy customization of the NAV platform or not. The embedded model involving heavy customization had some appeal but the support and upgrade questions were troubling. Additionally, research revealed that customization approaches sometimes doubled or even tripled the amount of data stored in NAV, which lead to complaints about performance and transaction locking. Furthermore, the unusual nature of some of their products and special metrics they wanted to track required additional customizations that would take the solution farther from standard capability.

Finally, the most prominent concern was the ongoing cost associated with the high volume of samples and swatches they sent to customers on a daily basis. Two of the EDI vendors proposed a pricing model that charged fees for every transaction processed.

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Given the fact that many EDI related transactions for zero priced samples meant that every sample would cost much more to process than their legacy solution that enabled direct exchange of data with their customer. Mitchell's objective was to lower their cost of doing business by implementing NAV – not increase it.

Upon learning what happens when Microsoft upgrades or updates Dynamics NAV, their decision was made. Each upgrade would likely require that their embedded customizations be reprogrammed to accommodate changes in the base application. Given this complexity and the resulting difficulty in upgrades, they knew that they and their customization provider would have to take ownership of the entire process. Any further customizations they made to accommodate upgrades had the potential to cause EDI problems. Clearly, Dynamics upgrades complicate embedded solutions. They needed a better solution.

A Simple EDI Solution from a All-in-One Service Provider

Given the downsides and compromises in the available options, the Mitchell team was grateful to discover that Data Masons Software did not introduce NAV customizations, could answer their EDI questions immediately, and support Mitchell directly while working closely with their NAV partner to optimize the implementation. Best of all, Data Masons did not force Mitchell to pay transaction fees but instead enabled Mitchell to connect directly to their partners securely and with zero transaction costs. Vantage Point EDI is an external application that integrates transactions with Dynamics NAV without requiring any changes to the Microsoft software code. Vantage Point's solution minded approach and Data Masons' NAV experts made it a setup and configuration exercise rather than a customized development project.

Getting Locked into Older Versions of NAV

One thing that the Mitchell team noticed as they contacted users of both the embedded solution and Vantage Point, was that most of the embedded solution users were marooned in older versions of Dynamics NAV because they couldn't justify the upgrade expense given the additional programming required to migrate to the latest version. Almost all of the users on legacy version expressed regret that they could not upgrade and enjoy the new features and user interface of the latest version. Microsoft's development model with frequent updates and feature improvements makes customization even more difficult to maintain going forward.

The Data Masons users talked about the simplicity of adjusting the configuration of Vantage Point to accommodate unique scenarios without customization. Additionally, users were pleasantly surprised to find that the integration between Vantage Point and Dynamics NAV was even deeper and broader than they had seen in the embedded solution. Best of all, strong process automation, email alerts and automatic transaction audit reports exceeded expectations.

The End of Paying to Give Things Away for Free

Given the high number of transactions processed to ship free samples and swatches, the fees charged by the Value Added Network (VAN) used by the embedded providers to communicate each transaction would mean they would end up paying to give those items away for free.

Since Vantage Point enables direct connection to suppliers, Mitchell was able to process all of those transactions with no additional fees. It was also reassuring that this direct connection was more secure than using a VAN, and Vantage Point even allowed them to use a VAN with those customers who absolutely required it.

Given the deep integration, the simplicity of configuration changes rather than programming changes, and the elimination of painful VAN transaction charges, Mitchell Enterprises decided to implement Vantage Point to automate their EDI.

Immediate Benefits

Today, Mitchell Fabrics enjoys the automation of EDI with the ability to transact 24/7 of a single-source provider for everything EDI. With previous tools, any question they asked went to their embedded solution reseller who called the company who actually wrote the customization, then back and forth, question after question. Even the simplest solution could require weeks of back and forth communications. With Vantage Point, one call to their Account Manager brought them immediate and useful answers.

EDI Made Simple®

EDI is all we do at Data Masons. Embedded EDI providers are often programming companies that work on many different projects other than EDI, which can cause them to lose focus. We're solely focused on EDI.

The nature of using EDI to process transactions requires the flexibility to move and adjust quickly. If a customer cannot move fast enough, this can result in significant chargebacks for non-compliance. With Vantage Point, adjusting the configuration of the solution takes a fraction of the time it takes to program new code, which allows customers to be quick and responsive.

> "We chose Data Masons and Vantage Point because the product is much easier to integrate, more reliable and more cost effective than traditional NAV EDI solutions built within the NAV product. Vantage Point allowed us to implement it cost effectively, and it's built to be extensible as our business grows, without the additional high costs associated with other EDI solutions."
> *- Thomas Hicks, CEO, Steiner Enterprises*

For more information about how to put Vantage Point EDI to work making EDI simple in your company, **contact us** at **datamasons.com** and learn more about EDI and ERP integration in our **executive briefs**.

Mitchell Fabrics saved **$60,000 in the first year** using Vantage Point.

- The flexibility with implementing business rules gave Mitchell new found agility.

- Setting up new partners became much more simple and cost effective than before which creates new business opportunities.