

Woodstream Discovers the Better Mouse Trap

Provider of Animal-Friendly Products Improves Business Processes, Customer Collaboration and Internal Integration

By Stephen Rosen

Woodstream provides animal friendly and organic alternatives for wildlife and pest control systems, lawn and garden products, and pet supplies. Brands include Victor Pest, Havahart, SaferBrand, Fi-Shock and Perky-Pet, with product lines including traps, repellents, baits, bird feeders, and landscaping & houseplant solutions.

They are a technologically sophisticated company who has found a better way to handle Business-to-Business (B2B) communication, Application-to-Application (A2A) integration, and automation of internal processes & reporting. In other words, they have “discovered the better mouse trap” for using business integration technology solutions to improve their business.

Woodstream sells to customers of all sizes—from big box retailers and home improvement giants such as Wal-Mart, K-Mart, Lowe’s and Home Depot; to hardware chains such as Ace, True Value and Do-It-Best; to down-town, mom and pop, and specialty stores. They have more than 1,000 customers representing over 100,000 retail outlets.

The company was informed by the provider of their legacy EDI system of the end of support for the product. Woodstream would have to go through a complete conversion and platform change to use the vendors supported solution. They decided to take the opportunity to investigate other solutions and other providers.

As the team was establishing requirements for a new system, they uncovered needs beyond traditional EDI. In order to accommodate their customers who were not using EDI, they needed an automated way to accept and integrate formats such as spreadsheets, flat files and XML. They also pinpointed a need for A2A integration to automate and synchronize sharing of data between disparate applications and platforms for better

reporting and improved internal business processes.

By adopting a business integration technology solution, they created a way to expedite the extensive amount of work required by IT during the company’s frequent acquisitions. They’ve enhanced reporting throughout the enterprise with their ability to synchronize data and processes and expose data from disparate systems. They have increased the availability of their Web ordering system, and automating the integration between website orders and their back-end applications and processes. They also can now manage both traditional EDI, and the much more complex automation of integrating non-EDI formats such as spreadsheets, XML, and flat files.

Managing Inventory Across the Supply Chain

Woodstream had already established good EDI relationships with its largest trading partners. But with a broader business integration approach, they were able to take these relationships to a higher level by linking to their partners’ Point of Sales (POS) systems.

POS data from many retailers comes directly into Woodstream’s iSeries server. Using their new solution, Woodstream created the processes that validate and move data to an application on their SQL server, which aggregates the information and generates comprehensive reports using Woodstream’s standard enterprise tools.

The reports generated give visibility into the customer data, which enables the sales team to have better relationships with their customers. Sales can make the customers aware of trends in regions,



products, and seasons, and make recommendations on how to more efficiently buy Woodstream products.

Mergers and Acquisitions

A big component of Woodstream’s plan for market penetration is growth through acquisitions. They have been acquiring, on average, one or two companies per year. Acquisitions are a challenge for any IT department. Typically, they’re not announced until the contracts are signed. And then IT is expected

to transfer all of the trading partner and transaction data of the acquired company into their systems—within days. This often meant “burning the midnight oil” to meet deadlines.

“We usually get the data from the other company in an Excel spreadsheet,” explained Schumacher. “The only way to enter the data into our systems was to manually rekey it. This was slow, labor intensive and error prone.”

Now, Woodstream quickly and easily sets up maps between the Excel spreadsheets and Woodstream applications, and the data is completely integrated with Woodstream’s processes. It takes minutes to do what used to take days—and without the errors.

Web Ordering System

Another way Woodstream is using business integration to improve both the customer experience and internal processes is through its Web Ordering System. Each of Woodstream’s websites has an online order form. It is used by consumers to order products as with any retail website. And, it is used even more by Woodstream’s 20 sales people in the field.

Data that comes in through the website goes directly to their Infor PRMS ERP System, which runs in their iSeries computer.

“The XML from the Web order goes right into PRMS,” said Schumacher. “When we had to rekey it, there were

Woodstream's Use of EXTOL EBI

Acquisitions
Web Ordering (XML)
Integrated EDI
Accepting Spreadsheets
and Flat Files

delays and errors. That's gone." As a result, Woodstream is encouraging their sales people to use the Web Ordering System, which is making their job easier. The orders placed are filled more quickly and accurately, which keeps the customers satisfied, and order fulfillment costs down.

The End of Swivel Chair Integration

Integrating XML from Web orders directly into PRMS is just one way that Woodstream is putting an end to "Swivel Chair Integration." That's the old-fashioned, but still much-used, method of having a data entry person print out the data from one application or system, and then spin around in a swivel chair to a separate PC to manually input it into another application or system. Although still alarmingly prevalent, even in otherwise technologically sophisticated companies, Swivel Chair Integration is loaded with obvious inefficiencies. Woodstream is on a crusade to totally eliminate it from their processes.

Order Placement and Fulfillment

"Woodstream is pretty sophisticated and complex. We have developed procedures so that a very high percentage of orders are never touched until they are actually picked, packed and shipped," explained Mowrer.

In fact, 70% of their orders come in through EDI. 120 of their major trading partners are EDI capable. They use 22 different EDI transaction types, and process between 60,000 and 95,000 transactions per month.

Woodstream uses four distribution centers strategically located throughout the United States and one in Canada. Woodstream outsources their trucking. When an order comes in from the website, from an EDI-enabled partner, or on a spreadsheet attached to an email, it automatically flows through PRMS, which sends data to a warehouse management system in the distribution centers.

"Our EDI orders aren't touched by human hands until it's time for pick and pack in the distribution centers," said Mowrer. "We've got the system so finely tuned that most orders ship within 1 to 3 days, go into transit, and reach their final destination 3 or 4 days after that."


The Next Frontier: Spreadsheets, XML, Flat Files and More

EDI is just one component of a B2B strategy. Another big challenge for Woodstream is handling orders from customers using non-EDI formats—generally smaller customers submitting orders on spreadsheets or flat files.

Formerly, these orders were handled through Swivel Chair Integration, and were cumbersome to say the least. But now, Woodstream has begun the process of automating the integration of non-EDI formats. They map the fields in a spreadsheet or flat file directly into their order entry system.

Is There Really a Better Mouse Trap?

There's always a better mouse trap—just look at the Woodstream product line. And as technology continues to progress, there will always be more efficient ways to run a company.

Woodstream has found more uses for business integration technology than they originally anticipated. Now, IT projects that once seemed daunting are immediately considered manageable. Whatever request comes along next—whether from a customer or from an internal department—Woodstream's IT department can handle it because of the agility afforded by their strategic approach to business integration. 

Some of Woodstream's Customers




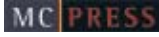


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- Agway
- Bass Pro
- Cabella's
- Coast to Coast
- Dick's Sporting Goods
- Do-It-Best
- Farm & Fleet
- Home Depot
- K-Mart
- Lowe's
- Menard's
- Modell's
- Orchard supply
- Petco
- Pet Smart
- Sentry
- Service Star
- Sports Authority
- Tractor Supply Company
- Tru-Value
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