DECADE OF CHANGE

What happened in the World of EDI in the last decade?

Well, at the end of the 1990's there was a lot of talk about “Is EDI Dead?” It was going to be replaced by XML. VANs were going to be replaced by AS2. Everybody can do it over the WEB! At the end of the decade, we were all tied up with Y2K (gee! I was even an AIAG-certified inspector!). In 2000, the “bubble burst” on a lot of the “go-go” Internet companies. Some lasted a year or two until their venture capital $$$ ran out. Some even survived. We thought it would be a transition to a perfect World where everyone communicated together in a paperless environment. But we thought that too when we went from the 1980's to the 1990's. Some things did get better then. Anybody remember when they had to recompile an entire EDI COBOL program everyime you added a partner or even changed the specs?

COMPANIES
I have had a look around and many of the companies I knew have disappeared . even some of the big players seem to have gone. Who are the current big players? Harbinger was merged away as was Supply Tech into something called Inovis. Gentran got bigger. Where did Seeburger come from? GEIS became something else called GXS. EDICT Systems is still around and got better.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT
Has there neen any real change to the impact on EDI on an organization. is the market all matured now? Did everyone who was going to get EDI, get EDI?

Has the internet and XML made an impact? In what way? Once I heard was XML was going to replace EDI though I never believed that. What about WEB-EDI?

At the beginning of this decade, we sort of knew what AS2 was; we didn't know who Drummond was (unless it was this guy who used to speak at EDI conferences).

I am not very sure if EDI is hot or not, but with the more and more companies who are using EDI related technology, even today in the bad economy; EDI is here to stay.

COSTS
Prices per KC seems to have dropped a bit (!?).. Are there new charging models?

And then there's one other aspect of this that may really hit home with many EDI groups - especially in today's economy...EDI versus XML. How much do you pay for your EDI transmissions? How much for each KC of data you send or receive? Now add to that the Schema every document. And with the open way that you can format the open and close tags, ... wow .... In X12/ANSI, it's a ST - the transaction set header - that tells you what I'm sending you - the 850. But with XML, I'm telling you that I'm sending you a <PURCHASE ORDER>. 3 characters (8 5 0) versus 14 (PURCHASEORDER) - don't forget the SPACE. Oh, and then I've got the OPEN <> and CLOSE </> tags to go with it... so now we've got 33 characters (16 for the open and 17 for the close)... That's ... let's see ... 3 plus multiply by ... ... carry the one... divide by .... We've got 11 times the number of characters.
Need to verify/quote author or else reword

IMPLEMENTATION
Implementation is the same bear it always was. Yes, there are more “tools”: cute little programs that track your progress and your partner's progress (or you can just use something like SalesForce because it is a great communications tool too). I recently wrote a two-part series about implementation on EC-BP (http://ec-bp.biz/). My tried-and-true implementation guidelines are basically unchanged from the 1990's and can be found in my EDI Tool Box (www.ominousweather.com/EDIToolBox/). You will conclude correctly that EDI implementation is really a “Project Management” exercise. Conclusion: nobody has yet to find a magic way (although having an 800-pounf gorilla on your team does help).

INDUSTRIES
Like in the 1990's, new industries began to be served by EDI as “niche” standards were developed. Trend-wise, healthcare “grew up” in this decade. In the early 1990's it was going to be a “dramatic” implementation as national healthcare became a reality. Wow! I was spending $70K:year to have an EDI healthcare guy on my

staff. We didn't get healthcare, but the industry grew up anyway.

STANDARDS
Actually, to begin with, before that, I would like to see ONE agreed-upon Standard for anything... then there will be no need to make changes...

And as far as standards are concerned, if we didn't have them, Henry Ford couldn't have automated building the first automobile (standardized parts) and we wouldn't have computers because we wouldn't have a standard electrical outlet, much less a standardized electrical supply (but lots of varieties: US, UK EU, etc).

EDI versus XML

	EDI	XML
Language Standards	X12, ANSI, EDIFACT, TRADACOMM, etc	Yes
Standardization	standard documents, your standard segments, your standard elements and your standard syntax and data element rules, sizes	Not really, a <TAGS> can be anything
Leeway	(1) MSG segment (2) some of the data elements are also a "free form text" field	It is the Wild Wild West
Operation	When it comes to the standards - I'll use X12/ANSI, as that's what I'm familiar with - you know what you're going to say. I'm ordering something, so I'm going to use an 850 Purchase Order. And I know that the BEG segment is the beginning segment of the document and I get to put My PO number and date in there. Then I may use the CUR segment to tell you what currency the order is for. And then I give you the next bit of information, then another, and another and another and - sooner or later - I get you all of the order information - items, quantities, costs, ship to, bill to and all the rest - and then I close the order.	Those <TAGS> that are to give you the definition of what is being sent don't have any kind of standard to govern them.... For example - I'm going to order something. But, how to I start off the XML order? Do I call the document a <PO> or do I call it an <ORDER> or do I call it the <PURCHASE> or a <BUY AGREEMENT> or ...? There are a number of different ways that I can tell you what I'm doing. The only "standard" is that I call it something and have an <OPEN TAG> and a </CLOSE TAG> and follow a certain syntax (the symbololgy to open <> and close</> the tags).
Order and direction	Also, in the X12/ANSI PO, I do have to follow a certain ... format ... or structure or flow to the data. Because of the standard, I follow a "flow" of data. This comes first, and it's follow by that, the other and this thing over here. There's a structural flow to the data that makes - to some - a certain kind of sense.	With XML, that structure is pretty much not there. Sure, maybe (for thesake of simplicity?) I'll have the <ORDER> (or whatever) designation first. Just so you know what the document and the data to follow is. But from there on, I can structure it however I want.
SCHEMA	Not required, EDI has STANDARDS	the SCHEMA is kind of like your X12/ANSI (or whatever) translation map or spec. It will tell the recipient of the data what it all means. What this tag means, what that tag means and what it's all supposed to say - just like the X12/ANSI translation spec.
The HOW	With EDI, you've already got that "how" in the translation map. And I'm not sending you that translation map every time I send you a PO. Instead, you get it once, set up	With XML - you will need to send that Schema every time with every document you send. I send you data and then I send you the "how" to read the data.

	the translation and every time I send you that same document, you know exactly "how" to read it and whatit means.	

CONCLUSIONS

At least now when you are at a cocktail party and mention you work in EDI, people have some idea what you do (and don't ask you to fix their son's game computer)

Wish list: I would like to live in a world where one computer can negotiate changes with the other computer and both implement the changes with no human intervention.

I followed a similar story on the EDI-L Group on Yahoo about “EDI over the last eight years”. Their was a great comment by Ralph Potter (who I regard as a real EDI guru): “I love standards and always wanted one of my own.”