EDI Directories

For a long time, I have dreamed of an EDI Trading Partner Directory. When I went into a new company, I usually built my own. The platform:software is not the issue, it is all about content. I had great information on current partners, good information on proposed partners, and no information on potential partners. There are now a lot of good sources that are available that I will bring out later. I had a finite number of data elements that I wanted in my database (EDI documents, VANs, contacts and more) and I wanted to be able to sort them and pick them. Refreshing my data depended on importing from where ever I could obtain data.

I have worked for companies with 100s of EDI customers, most went through a VAN. Periodically I used to find out about an existing customer that was EDI capable, but that I was not aware of.

To see what directories are available, I picked a few companies and decided to see what kind of directories I might find facts in. My career has been with logistics, manufacturing, retailing and food. Logistics is a separate exercise, so here are the sample industries I picked: a hardware chain, an appliance manufacturer, a department store, a supermarket chain, a food manufacturer, an electronics supplier, a clothing supplier, an auto supplier.

Now I started searching for trading partner directories. First example I found was Booknet Canada (a not-for-profit agency dedicated to innovation in the Canadian book supply chain) which was good but did not help me at all. Maybe I am not a guru of Web searches?

Then I found ECEDI Vantage Point WebSite that has a links page that is quite helpful. In my example: I followed B2B Hubs to a few of my sample companies. Up pops EDI guidelines and a lot of other good stuff. Some of the other links they have are healthcare providers, associations like the chemical industry data exchange. Then I found Spe+EDI (a Montreal software consulting company) that had some great links too. Others included Covalent Works, EDI Center, and EDI Partners. But no "one stop shopping". I liked the ones who had a lot of information on a company.

There are many live directories for many groups of people on the Internet, and they are kept quite up-to-date. There are 3 main issues to do the same for the EDI community: (1) cost; (2) keeping it accurate; (3) promoting it to make it a complete list

The VANS have a perfect list which is totally up-to-data. Otherwise, they will not be able to inform their customers about issues or get paid. Every time I called a VAN to setup a new Trading Partner relationship, they check their own internal directory to find out how to make it happen.

So the $64 question is how to convince all the VANS to share that data on a ONE semi-public directory.

By running my existing list of customers against such a directory, I will find more EDI customers; and this eventually will translate to more business for the VANs.

Now, to pay for this directory and maintain it: someone could charge a small yearly amount from all those who are listed or else charge those who use it. To get that payment, you will

need a billing system and an update mechanism. The VANs could also use that directory. I really like the idea of a list with basic information and links to more extensive data like a company's EDI conventions. We should "go global" with our coverage. Last idea: maybe we could charge users and pass the profits back to the participating trading partners and VANs (after my service fee for thinking up such a good idea).