Looking Under the Covers

I have been off on a logistics assignment for a few weeks without too much EDI involved. In truth, there was no EDI involved, so that got me to thinking "why not?" We are "trading" with a couple of major companies: a leading truck-by-the-day rental company and a leading temporary help agency. What were we doing? We had a contract from a hospital chain to remove old furniture and move it elsewhere. It is a temporary thing: when it is done, it is done. Nobody wants to spend time on an ad hoc project of short duration (low ROI).

But, everybody says "We do e-commerce, we take credit cards". This sounds great on the surface, but to purchase their product, there may be, for some customers, an horrendous amount of manual paperwork that is not included in their ever-so-simple on-line purchase form.

So what is my idea like and how do we achieve it? Currently, most EDI trading arrangements are conducted on an on-going/regular basis. The formats (conventions) have been exchanged between the partners; the information exchange has been tested; and the relationship itself is cemented in the partners systems. Achieving what I will call "AD HOC EDI" would be through a "value added exchange service" (I can call it a VAES, because it hasn't been invented yet). This service would:
   (1) be open to sign up by any company or organization that wants to automate ad hoc transactions on either (or both) a sending and receiving basis;
   (2) allow the receiving customer to prescribe the format they wish to receive;
   (3) allow the sending customer to detail their offering and their capabilities;
   (4) delivery could be through the exchange, AS2, an existing VAN;
   (5) not limited to X12, or even to any EDI Standard;
   (6) testing capability would exist.

Using a Purchase Order and Invoice as representative samples, the Exchange Service would electronically match sending and receiving Purchase Orders, then Invoices; then "publish" specifications for a "convention". All necessary conversions would be carried out electronically within the Exchange Service.

Important: the Exchange Service does not use it's own standards; it uses those of the trading partners. The Exchange Service itself would operate in a "neutral" language: how about XML?

Conclusion: adding capabilities for AD HOC EDI will boost the number of EDI transactions more than any of us can even realize!