

Should My Client Start A New EDI VAN?

Lot of action in the EDI VAN industry recently. If you know what I am talking about, you are concerned. If you don't know, consider yourself lucky and go celebrate. Well, my client is in the former group and posed an interesting question to me. He is privately-held (and my non-disclosure agreement says I will be shot if I talk about him too much). He has a food buying group that is heavily dependent on EDI, plus a bunch of other things like community newspapers that he wants to be more heavily involved with EDI. He already owns a couple of computer-related companies, so his question "should we start our own VAN?" was not off the wall.

Well, around 1993/94, I had been a reseller of VAN services (WOW, a lot of water over the dam since then!). That sort of qualified me to sort of an expert level. After studying everything I could, surprise, not much has changed. I guess if you are making money, why rock the boat? Although they utilize X 12.56 Mailbag Standard, their messaging systems predate the Internet. Of the many alternatives (VAN, commerce hubs, peer-to-peer methods, hosted solutions); the VAN reaches the most number of trading partners with the least complexity to be managed.

My conclusion! Most VANs are obsolete! The current externally configured VAN structure (big solutions, long contracts) is better implemented as a Web Services API (Application Programming Interface). That will give you the ability to call and connect to the World of Global EDI on your own!

What did I find? A glimmer of hope: ECGRID®. Their ECGridOS® provides the horsepower to build a global e-commerce network. Real-time tracking, like a FedEx® shipment, they track all interchanges from the moment they enter the system, along every step across the network, and through the delivery confirmation. Various interactive reports allow you to see the status of any interchange or mailbag on the infrastructure. All of this works with your server, cloud platform or application.

The most interesting thing happened to our client company, they put the word out in a few places that they were going to build an Electronic Commerce Messaging System, and the first reply was from a Chinese company. That goes to show you how eager Chinese industry is at searching for innovation.

In keeping with the spirit of not using this forum to promote specific products, search out "Electronic Commerce Messaging Systems" instead.