

What is an ECCP?

It stands for “Electronic Commerce Communications Provider”. As you might have guessed, it is “Cloud-based”. It is a neat way of handling all your EDI communications in a centralized and efficient manner. ECCP replaces a VAN for you; but if your trading partner utilizes a VAN, an ECCP still interfaces with your partner through his VAN. An ECCP is far less labor-intensive for you than either AS2 or MFT (Managed File Transfer).

Back when dinosaurs still roamed through computer rooms, VAN's provided “Value Add” in that they were secure; always available; provided a common link between partners; and rooted out bad or misdirected data. Much of the EDI community sticks with a VAN because it is an outsourced operation and because many of us hold to the old saying: “If it ain't broke, don't fix it.”

Many similarities exist between a VAN and an ECCP:

- (1) manage (outsource) client's connections (including AS2 and MFT);
- (2) standardized services;
- (3) act as a neutral third party and trace/log all messages (although an ECCP, by nature of its technology, far excels a VAN).

An ECCP is “X%” cheaper than a VAN. I pick 40% as my number, but it varies. The real savings over AS2 and MFT is in your own labor costs (renewing AS2 connections, trouble shooting MFT transmissions, etc.)

There are several highly motivated and proficient vendors in the field. All are constantly improving their services. New ideas, concepts and improvements are popping up. For instance, a directory service (see my previous blog about whoisedi.com).

The ECCP, through a Web Services API, provides for flexibility in EDI transit.; as opposed to the usual externally configured “per connection” approach. With an ECCP, communications can be built in rather than added on. The result is that you can implement each communications path under software control (hence less errors, better traceability).

Progress by ECCP's can go a long way toward making EDI as common a routine as the “Shopping Cart” is in Web Commerce. A common complaint of developers has been not being able to call and connect to the World from within their application.

EDI was once exclusive to big business; connecting to their own suppliers, distributors, etc. But EDI is progressing across the spectrum of medium and small businesses. But there are many challenges as these businesses do not have the funding or the clout that big businesses have. As an example, nationwide companies who sell tools have been into EDI for a long time. Now, what if a hardware distributor in a large city wanted to create an EDI trading circle with all the small hardware stores in his region? Why not? It is all a paper/FAX and checks environment now. Lot of manual effort.....great opportunity to “work-out” lots of costs. An ECCP, along with a “managed EDI service” would be ideal.