



CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

Arnold Logistics Meeting Customer Demands

► CHALLENGE

As a full-service logistics provider, Arnold Logistics needs to anticipate its customer's needs and move swiftly to accommodate them. Arnold provides hundreds of customers with a range of logistic services, including warehousing, fulfillment, packaging and returns from more than 30 distribution centers in four states. Its high level of service and customer commitment has led to the company's continued growth and to its inclusion in Inbound Logistics Top 100 third party logistics companies.

With its breadth of customers, the challenges facing Arnold for providing customized, world-class service can be daunting. Arnold must be ready to create tailored services to meet its customers' specific issues; for example designing an automated picking and sorting system for one of the world's largest software publishers, or smoothly handling the continuous addition of new products for one of the world's biggest food companies. Being nimble and flexible is key.

Based on its experience and success in third-party logistics, Arnold developed deep expertise in supply chain management, essentially renting that expertise out to other companies. "It's making sure they have proper inventory levels, validating loads and shipping based on business rules," says Eric Fennell, Arnold Logistic's systems analyst. "We manage all the headache stuff so the customer doesn't have to."

EDI is a key aspect of what Arnold Logistics does. Since 2001, the use of EDI – in particular, ANSI X12 and custom XML over the AS2 transport mechanism – has been growing among its customers. To satisfy this demand, Arnold needed to find a new EDI package that would meet its exacting standards.

► APPROACH

Arnold could have written its own EDI translator, as they had done with their in-house warehouse management system, but that path could have introduced some substantial challenges for their 14-person IT staff. "Building something like that would have been a pretty decent effort, and at that time we weren't prepared for it," Fennell says. "A proper EDI translator handles document logging and error trapping, and that can't fail. There are all kinds of things that can go wrong in the communication and translation process."

For Arnold the major advantage of the Boomi EDI System is its flexibility – especially in its separation of the transport mechanism from the content and format of the EDI. "If somebody says, 'We've been FTPing this, but now we want to do this through AS2,'

Business Challenge

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Why Boomi?

Boomi can do any-to-any translations, and the transportation mechanism is separate from the data, so Arnold can hook in existing processes without change to the content. The Boomi Visual Integration Platform™ employs a graphical flow chart for easily setting up and mapping B2B connections.

it's very easy to set that up. And you don't have to worry about messing up any of the content," says Fennell. "In the graphical designer, it's as easy as unplugging the FTP transport and plugging in an AS2 connection."

Arnold will often get requests to send confirmation emails in parallel with a standard EDI process. In traditional translators, that can be very cumbersome and even require custom programming. Boomi's graphical design process can achieve this in less than five minutes. It can handle a variety of one-off requests without requiring programming.

Fennell continues, "I enjoy being on a phone call in which a customer says 'Boy it would be nice if...' and I can tell them it's done before we hang up." By providing such extras as concurrent emailed lists of order confirmations, Arnold Logistics has leveraged Boomi's capabilities to allow customers to track and error-check their own processes."


► RESULTS

Boomi was implemented at Arnold Logistics in 2001. Since then, the product which was originally installed on the OS/400 server moved to a Windows Server 2003 box running SQL Server, has processed millions of advanced ship notices, shipping confirmations and other EDI and business-to-business (B2B) content for Arnold Logistics. The system has been enthusiastically received by their customers, which more and more want to use EDI and XML over AS2.

As Fennell observed, "When it comes to data exchange, it gets very touchy. I wasn't comfortable using an unproven technology or one that lacks the proper error handling. Boomi provides the safety net."

While EDI is supposed to be a standard that companies adhere to, the fact is most companies make their own modifications to EDI documents, and that complicates the integration. "It might be X12, but everybody's got their own flavor. For example, they might use different sets of qualifiers or put a particular data element in a different place. With Boomi, that's not a problem. We can easily construct their profiles and map their transactions using Boomi's graphical interface and built-in EDI transaction templates," Fennell says. "We also connect to a good number of AS/400 customers, and most of them are building their own interfaces or contracting out to a vendor. It's consistently shocking to them how quickly we can respond to a request for a change to the interface's format, content or transport method."

Today Arnold Logistics has simplified its own integration infrastructure to make it easier to support customer demands. In addition to reducing internal personnel workloads by eliminating the need for programming, Arnold can now better respond to customers' technical requests. Once again, Arnold has delivered at the high service level its customers have come to expect.

 Boomi's price point was more reasonable than the competition, and it had more capabilities. 

Eric Fennell,
Systems Analyst
Arnold Logistics