



Overview

Business Challenge

Manual data processing made Bonnie vulnerable to human errors and long delays. To improve customer service, they needed a solution for increasing operational efficiency and providing better visibility into internal business processes and external trading partners.

Solution

- IBM® Sterling Business Integration Suite
 - IBM® Sterling B2B Integration Services
 - IBM® Sterling B2B Integration Services Plus
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Bonnie Plants

IBM® Sterling B2B Integration Services enables Bonnie Plants to grow and operate more efficiently

Customer background

Bonnie Plants (Bonnie) began in 1918 in a backyard and has grown to include 68 growing stations around the country. Bonnie currently has 450 sales representatives servicing more than 13,000 accounts. A national plant wholesaler based in Alabama, Bonnie is dedicated to supplying retail stores throughout the United States and Canada with the best herb, flower, and vegetable plants available. As part of Alabama Farmers Cooperative (AFC), a regionally federated supply and marketing agricultural cooperative, Bonnie has brought top-quality plants to gardeners across the country throughout the company's history. AFC acquired its most profitable division, Bonnie in 1975.

Business challenge

Bonnie has been an IBM Sterling customer since 1994, using Gentran:Director® for EDI and Sterling Collaboration NetworkSM for their VAN services. "With sales data taking up to three days to process, we felt like we were drowning in data," said Tim Hazle, Computer Services Manager, AFC. "It could take an entire day to process sales orders, and those stats were subject to human error." After pulling information across a dial-up modem, Bonnie often discovered the data was incomplete. Continuously facing the challenges of trading electronically with little visibility, Bonnie realized they had outgrown the systems they had been using for the past 10 years and began looking for a solution.

Bonnie had to face the challenge of 70 percent of their business occurring between the months of March and May. They looked in-house, but they did not have the technical resources, and it did not make sense financially because of their seasonal business. The scalability of the solution needed to be that of a big seller versus that of a smaller homegrown solution. Looking for a better way to understand their sales, and project the needs of the retail chains carrying their plants, Bonnie decided outsourcing would be the best answer.



Business benefits:

- Improved onboarding time
 - Increased visibility
 - Enhanced reporting capabilities
 - Improved internal customer satisfaction
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Solution

In the spring of 2007, Bonnie recognized that Sterling B2B Integration Services would allow them to remain competitive while reducing their overall costs. They began the implementation process in September, and had all trading partners moved by December. The solution was deployed in phases to ensure Bonnie's business would not be interrupted during implementation. As the world's largest producer of vegetable plants, Bonnie's customers are some of the top-named home improvement and discount department stores in the United States and Canada.

Sterling B2B Integration Services now enables Bonnie to connect people, processes, and technology across boundaries. With Sterling B2B Integration Services, each time a Bonnie product is scanned at a retail store, the information is collected, put into a common layout, and then processed immediately. Bonnie's sales team can check sales, and project the needs of an individual retail store carrying their plants. This real-time visibility allows salesmen to drop off new plants where and when they are needed. Sterling B2B Integration Services helps improve the service Bonnie provides and enables them to trade more efficiently, maximizing market opportunities. With Sterling B2B Integration Services, Bonnie has gained real-time, end-to-end visibility and control over their business processes internally and external trading partners.



“The \$10-20 million growth we saw in 2008 can be attributed to Sterling B2B Integration Services. Bonnie Plants cannot live without the data that Sterling B2B Integration Services delivers to us daily.”

— Tim Hazle, Computer Services Manager,
Alabama Farmers Cooperative

Sterling B2B Integration Services processes invoices, adjustments, payment orders, remittance advice, purchase orders, product activity data, and customer text messages for Bonnie. Bonnie now processes, on average, 90,000 documents per month, with around six million transactions during their peak season of March through May. Sterling B2B Integration Services is designed to accelerate Bonnie’s ability to achieve B2B collaboration by empowering them to use their internal resources to rapidly grow and adapt their B2B community.

Key benefits

Maximized business opportunities

Due to the seasonal nature of Bonnie’s business it was critical they had a system that could handle a large influx of data during a short period of time. Bonnie found that Sterling B2B Integration Services offered the scalability they needed. With Sterling B2B Integration Services, Bonnie’s sales force has confidence they can deliver on the needs of their customers. Bonnie has visibility into their customer’s inventory, enabling them to anticipate the needs of an individual store and have merchandise dropped off when needed.

Better B2B integration

Bonnie now has the technical ability to meet their customers’ requirements pertaining to data translation. They have been able to increase profitability by reducing costs and increasing reliability of their B2B operations. Prior to the implementation of Sterling B2B Integration Services, the onboarding of new trading partners was a daunting task for both Bonnie and their customers. Now, Bonnie adds customers faster and more accurately. Bonnie also uses Sterling B2B Integration Services to ensure business critical documents are processed on-time, which allows for better service and faster sales turnarounds.

Ease of implementation

It was critical to Bonnie that their business not be affected during the implementation of Sterling B2B Integration Services. A high degree of proactive support through a single-point-of-contact for all business issues, escalations, and questions, as well as an assigned customer service representative, ensured a smooth delivery of the solution without interruption to their business.



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