



INDUSTRY

Healthcare

GEOGRAPHY

North America

CHALLENGES

As a key provider of medical products to the U.S. healthcare industry, AmerisourceBergen wanted 24/7 communication channels with its trading partners — especially during peak business activity.

SOLUTION

Axway B2Bi

RESULTS

AmerisourceBergen uses B2Bi to deliver a scalable, highly available digital front door for all business units — enabling it to rapidly identify and resolve EDI issues and meet demanding service-level agreements.

AmerisourceBergen

CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

AmerisourceBergen

AmerisourceBergen delivers vital medical products on time with always-on trading partner integration

AmerisourceBergen operates one of the largest healthcare supply chains in the U.S. The company partners with global manufacturers, providers and pharmacies to deliver life-saving products to some of the country's largest healthcare providers and retailers.

Like many organizations with long and complex supply chains, AmerisourceBergen depends on electronic data integration (EDI) to orchestrate its business processes efficiently. Each day, the company exchanges more than 200,000 EDI messages with its partners, many of which must be processed and acknowledged within short windows of time according to the company's service-level agreements (SLAs).

Scott Marshall, Director, Application Delivery Services — EDI Technology at AmerisourceBergen, takes up the story: "We process around 220 million EDI transactions annually, and managing such a large volume of messages presents some tough technical and operational challenges. In the past, each of our 15 business units relied on their own separate file gateways for trading partner communications. While this approach had worked well for many years, we realized that it would become increasingly difficult to onboard and manage our trading partners as the business grew."

Growing pains

Whenever AmerisourceBergen engages with a new retail partner, it typically needs to build B2B integrations with each of that retailer's stores across the country. Large retailers can have more than 1,500 locations, which represented thousands of hours of onboarding work for AmerisourceBergen's EDI team.

Moreover, even once the integrations were complete, managing and maintaining them was a full-time job. With multiple file gateways in use across the business, investigating and resolving file-delivery issues often created hours of complex work for the EDI team, diverting resources from trading partner onboarding initiatives and lengthening time-to-market.

As well as limiting AmerisourceBergen's ability to respond rapidly to growth opportunities, the existing EDI architecture posed a risk to the business. Scott Marshall explains: "If one of our partners sends us an EDI message and we do not acknowledge it within the SLA, we risk receiving a financial penalty or even losing orders to a competitor."

“In the past, our gateways and file translation engines were interconnected, meaning that an issue with the translation platform had the potential to prevent us from sending and receiving files. By separating our file processing and translation capabilities, we knew that we would be able to ensure that partners can always send us messages – even if a technical issue with the translation engine means we have to hold those messages in a queue while we perform maintenance.”

Rebuilding from the ground up

To support its long-term growth objectives, AmerisourceBergen decided to rearchitect its EDI platform to deliver a single, integrated set of systems and processes for all trading partner communications, backed by a loosely coupled technical architecture that would mitigate the risks of dependencies between components. The objective was to enable greater scalability, availability and performance, while empowering the EDI team to focus on value-added activities such as trading partner onboarding.

“The scope of our project required us to rebuild our EDI platform from the ground up,” recalls Marshall. “Because we were consolidating multiple gateways into a central platform, we wanted a solution that could do more than simply deliver the targeted levels of reliability and performance. As well as a faster approach to trading partner onboarding, we looked for a solution that would enable us to offer greater self-service capabilities to the business – reducing the need for our EDI team to spend hours hunting down data on individual transactions.”

Trusted partner

For many years, AmerisourceBergen has relied on B2Bi from Axway to deliver file gateway services for many parts of its business. Based on its positive experiences with the platform, the company decided to standardize the latest version of B2Bi as its single gateway for all in- and out-bound trading partner communications.

Marshall comments: “The Axway solution met all of our key criteria for the new file gateway. The web interface in the latest version of B2Bi makes it easy for our team to set up new trading partners, certificates and EDI configurations. Crucially, the solution offers rich, RESTful API capabilities, which enables us to build real-time data integrations that are simple to use. As a result, the business can access fine-grained data on the status of their messages without needing to go through the EDI team.”

Enabling round-the-clock services

To ensure high performance and 24/7 uptime, AmerisourceBergen deployed the new solution in a high-availability configuration, taking advantage of geo-clustering across its two primary data centers in Texas and Pennsylvania. The new architecture includes two completely independent clusters synchronized using the solution’s peer network functionality, ensuring that partners can send messages to AmerisourceBergen even if an entire data center goes offline for patching, maintenance, or a technical issue.

“Partnering with Axway on this project was a tremendous success,” says Marshall. “We have always found Axway Professional Services to be responsive, knowledgeable and thorough, and this engagement was no exception. Working side-by-side with Axway, we migrated one file type at a time, verifying that the new routing rules were working as expected. Because all the changes were internal, the process was completely transparent to our trading partners, and there was zero disruption to our day-to-day operations.”

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Scott Marshall, Director, Application Delivery Services – EDI Technology, AmerisourceBergen

He adds: “The Axway team was tightly integrated with our own throughout the project, and knew our systems and processes inside and out. There was always someone to answer our questions or provide support when we needed it, and we are extremely pleased with the success of the collaboration.”

Gaining full visibility

Today, 70 percent of AmerisourceBergen’s \$160-billion-dollar annual revenue is processed via EDI. Every message now passes through a single, secure B2Bi gateway — helping the company to manage a growing trading partner base more efficiently than ever.

“The difference in our visibility of EDI messages is like night and day,” explains Marshall. “We have agreements with partners that we will share data within a specific window of time. With B2Bi, we can monitor those transactions automatically to ensure that we are meeting our SLAs. When we do need to track down information on a transaction, we now only need to search for it in one place — cutting the time required from two to three hours, down to just 15 minutes, a reduction of up to 90 percent.”

He adds, “We are also harnessing the API capabilities of the Axway solution to deliver EDI metadata directly to the business. For example, on the outbound side we’ve created a workflow that automatically shows users when their message has been sent and acknowledged by a partner. This deflects calls away from our EDI helpdesk, and frees our team to focus on other development and support activities.”

Freedom to grow

In recent years, some of AmerisourceBergen’s key retail clients have grown through mergers and acquisitions, increasing their store footprints significantly. In the past, integrating with new stores required large amounts of manual work for AmerisourceBergen — but today, that has all changed.

“By combining the built-in trading partner management tools in B2Bi with our own custom front end, we’ve created automated patterns for onboarding,” comments Marshall. “Rather than manually re-keying the same data over and over, we can now automatically set up EDI integrations with new partners, even down to emailing them the onboarding instructions.

“As well as reducing the risk of human error, this automated process saves us thousands of our hours for large launches — enabling us to respond in a rapid and agile manner when growth opportunities arise. In fact, we estimate that we could accommodate 30 percent growth in our trading partner base over the next two years with no change to our EDI headcount or infrastructure.”

By moving its B2B integration processes to a future-ready platform, AmerisourceBergen is helping the business to deliver vital medical products on time to retailers and healthcare providers across the country.

“Our supply chains have a huge impact on patients’ lives, and it’s crucial that we can track every order and every piece of inventory with pinpoint accuracy,” concludes Marshall. “Thanks to Axway, we can deliver dependable EDI services to the business even as our trading partner volumes grow.”

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**Learn more about scaling your
EDI platform effectively →**