

TTI's seamless B2B channel delivers supply information in an instant.

Overview

■ Challenge

Improve customer service by obtaining faster quotes from suppliers; improve employee productivity; minimize impact of integration projects on IT resources

■ Solution: Integrating Stage

Automated trading partner relationship system for pricing and availability queries

■ Why IBM

Demonstrated success with a TTI supplier; compliance with RosettaNet standards; support for IBM WebSphere® MQ

■ Key Business Benefits

Faster supplier queries (better customer service; improved employee productivity); reduced WAN connectivity fees; 53% faster integration development cycles

■ Business Partners

Peregrine Systems;
CommerceQuest



In addition to its broad and deep inventories and impeccable delivery record, electronic component distributor TTI has made a name for itself through online value-added services such as component modifications and automated component shipment, which save customers time, money and effort.

In the highly volatile electronics industry, vast oversupplies can rapidly transform into acute shortages. What keeps electronics distributors such as Fort Worth, Texas-based TTI in a leadership position is a relentless improvement in supply chain management not only through contractual arrangements with business trading partners but also through the innovative application of e-business technology.

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—David Love, Manager of e-business Systems, TTI

Key Components

Software

- IBM WebSphere Partner Agreement Manager
- IBM WebSphere MQ

Servers

- IBM @server xSeries™
 - IBM @server zSeries™
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Founded in 1971, TTI is the world's largest distributor of passive, interconnect and electromechanical components for commercial and military applications. The \$1 billion, 1,200-employee company serves 13,000 electronics manufacturers worldwide, sourcing 160,000 products from 30 component suppliers.

Point-to-point integrations drain IT resources

To keep pace with customer demand, TTI needs to query its suppliers regularly about the price and availability of specific components. In the past, the only way employees at TTI's 50 branch offices could do this was to access their suppliers' inventory systems over dedicated leased lines or through a network service provider. Then, the TTI staff members would have to enter the data into TTI's inventory system, an internally developed application running on an IBM @server zSeries mainframe.

Seeking to eliminate extraneous data entry and reduce wide area networking costs by integrating its inventory system with its suppliers' systems over the Internet, TTI began to develop point-to-point connections with each supplier through proprietary interfaces. But the company was able to complete only six such integration projects over a three-year period. "It became increasingly clear that these ad hoc integrations were too much of a burden on our business," says David Love, TTI's manager of e-business systems. "We needed a more standard way to access our suppliers' information through our legacy system."

Search for standards-based solution leads to IBM Business Partners

TTI found the standard it was looking for in RosettaNet, a consortium of major IT, electronic components and semiconductor manufacturing companies working to create and implement industry-wide, open e-business process standards. These standards include data dictionaries, an implementation framework, business message schemas and process specifications called Partner Interface Processes (PIPs).

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–David Love

Looking for RosettaNet-compliant software it could use to create an integration hub for its suppliers, TTI attended a RosettaNet provider conference, where it examined offerings from 25 vendors. Ultimately, the company chose Alliance Manager software from IBM Business Partner Extricity (which has since been acquired by IBM Business Partner Peregrine Systems). Alliance Manager not only offered the connectivity features TTI needed, but was also an eminently affordable solution, which several of TTI's suppliers had implemented with great success.

WebSphere MQ bridges integration gaps

Like most comparable software packages, Alliance Manager could run either on UNIX® or on Microsoft® Windows NT® operating systems. TTI opted to run it on a Windows NT-based IBM @server xSeries system. What was missing, however, was a way to enable the messages from Alliance Manager—residing on the xSeries server—to reach TTI's legacy inventory system on the mainframe. TTI solved its dilemma with IBM WebSphere MQ, after noticing that many of the vendors supported the IBM cross-platform messaging solution.

IBM and Peregrine Systems have since strengthened their strategic relationship, and Alliance Manager is now offered through IBM as WebSphere Partner Agreement Manager. "Although IBM was not connected with the Extricity product at the time we selected it, we are delighted that IBM is now supporting the software," Love says. "IBM's vast resources and its track record in B2B integration give us the confidence that we've made a sound investment in B2B technology."

Peregrine Systems provided implementation support for WebSphere Partner Agreement Manager, while IBM Business Partner CommerceQuest assisted with the WebSphere MQ installation and configuration. With help from these companies, TTI had its first 2 suppliers connected in just 6 weeks—a 53 percent reduction in development time compared to the company's previous integration efforts.

“We envision that WebSphere Partner Agreement Manager, along with WebSphere MQ, will form the basis of a B2B hub through which we can route many more of our interactions with suppliers and customers.”

—David Love



With cross-company system integration, every TTI employee can access supplier information. This saves 2 to 3 TTI product managers from doing pricing and availability lookups for as many as 100 employees.

All TTI employees in all of the company's branches now have realtime access to pricing and availability information for these two suppliers from within the TTI system. As a result, the employees can answer pricing and availability queries faster, enabling them to be more productive and provide better customer service. At the same time, the Internet-based connectivity is helping the company reduce its wide area networking fees.

Each B2B relationship is unique, yet all agree on XML

TTI's pricing and availability requests are initiated either when TTI plans inventory replenishment to support existing customer contracts or when a customer requests a quote for a new contract. In either case, TTI employees first check in-stock inventory on the company's system. If additional quantities are required, TTI users can press a function key, which triggers a supplier lookup process in WebSphere Partner Agreement Manager.

TTI used the graphical development environment in WebSphere Partner Agreement Manager to model its integrated inventory management processes. The processes govern how pricing and availability queries are handled with each supplier and what data is exchanged. "We especially liked the software's elegant, flowchart-style interface," Love says. "It made the process modeling very easy."

Although each process describes a unique agreement between TTI and a specific supplier, WebSphere Partner Agreement Manager helps standardize the way business processes and data are defined. It does this using RosettaNet PIPs—specialized system-to-system XML-based dialogues. "That saves us a lot of time," Love says, "because we don't have to negotiate process and data definitions with every supplier."

Process integration to spread across the enterprise

As a leader in its market, TTI is paving the way for more of its suppliers and customers to implement standards-based B2B integration solutions. And as the company begins to supplement its internal processes with RosettaNet running on WebSphere software, it is also serving as a shining example of how B2B and internal business processes can come together to create a seamless value chain. Love concludes, "We envision that WebSphere Partner Agreement Manager, along with WebSphere MQ, will form the basis of a B2B hub through which we can route many more of our interactions with suppliers and customers."

For more information

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