



Documents Exchange between EDI and ERP Systems

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Exchanging documents between EDI Systems and ERP Systems is a common task done daily by thousands of companies all over the world who trades electronically. Thirty years ago when companies first started to trade using dial up modems and computer power wasn't strong enough, exchanging documents was complicated task which needed huge investments on I.T., planning and execution. Today, exchanging documents is common business practice and EDI tools, translators and maps were developed to easy the task on implementing EDI. Exchanging documents between two parties require some tools known as EDI translators and EDI Maps.

EDI Translator is tool that reads EDI files and let the EDI administrator assign each field (we call it element in the EDI language) in the EDI file into the correct spot in the database or some memory structure to hold the transaction data. The more the features that the EDI Translator software has, the easier task the administrator has. During the translation process there could be several steps involved, like data validation and data integrity. We also call that process mapping because we map every field in the EDI file to some location. This is the very basic task that needs to be done when implementing EDI.

In order to exchange EDI documents between two systems, we need to export the data from one system into a flat file, then we import that file into the second system. The first question that comes into mind is how both system knows how the flat file looks like?

Each EDI document has a file format and uses a specific set of segments in order to pass the data. These set of segments, the times they repeat and other rules of the file layout is mandated by the EDI organization (X12, EDIFACT). There are several EDI organizations around the world and the most popular today is X12, also the next popular standard is EDIFACT (Europe). Those organizations decide on the EDI file layout, what should and should not be in the file and basically set the rules for everyone who uses EDI, how the file that they generate should look like.

Exchanging documents involved two directions, in and out.

Import – involved importing the EDI Documents from a flat file into the EDI system, that file would be in a specific file format agreed by both parties who understand their needs and know which data is important to them and write this data in the file. It also involved importing the data from an EDI standard like X12 into the ERP system, in that case there might be some configuration on the ERP system to be able to read X12 files and know where to put it, that depends mostly on the system used in the organization. Some ERP system can handle EDI file better then others, and it should be another parameter for the company who wants to buy an ERP system if that system

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support imports of EDI files or at least let them configure manually how to import EDI files.

Export – involved exporting (writing out) the data from an ERP system into a flat file in an EDI file format like X12 in the correct transaction set specification. It also involved exporting the data from an EDI system into a flat file, none EDI format, that later on will be imported to an ERP system.

Import and Export routine should be supported by the ERP system and they should be strong enough to support different kinds of files layout.

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