Weigh Your Options Before Setting up a Point to Point AS2 Connection

EDI over the Internet via the AS2 direct-connect technology continues to grow as businesses with high volume EDI traffic urge their trading partners to implement a direct connection for their eCommerce needs. An AS2 request from a highly influential business partner may put extra pressure on a company to set up a direct connection in an effort to maintain that relationship, but it’s important to evaluate these considerations first:

**An AS2 direct connection requires a dedicated EDI solution for your AS2-enabled trading partners, in addition to the method you use to exchange electronic documents with your non-AS2 partners.** That infrastructure – software, hardware, firewalls, certificates, complex testing – and the expertise to manage it may or may not exist in your company. Managing two or more EDI systems can be time consuming. For example, you must monitor Message Disposition Notifications (MDNs) daily to ensure mission-critical documents are delivered, and AS2 certificates must be renewed periodically, lest they expire and document transmission halts. If you decide to set up a direct connect, an alert system should be employed to inform your tech support team if your AS2 connection goes down.

**When moving EDI documents via an AS2 direct connection, you lose visibility to those transactions along with the ability to obtain and report traffic statistics.** AS2 connections are similar to a pipeline – you open the spigot and data flows. A document received through an AS2 connection is pushed straight to your EDI sub-system, which could cause complications if a trading partner sends you a document type your translator is not set up to handle, or if it is a document you don’t wish to receive. The EDI documents that flow through the AS2 connection are separate from your other EDI traffic, so you won’t be able to gather, compare, and report on valuable EDI traffic statistics with your AS2-enabled trading partners using tools such as the LENS tool or IDX Tracker.

**An alternative to setting up an AS2 direct connect is to use a hybrid solution such as the IDEA ExchangeSM.** IDEA Exchange can be used for business-to-business managed services *and* to establish a direct connect for select high-volume trading partners. This B2B eCommerce solution enables you to comply with AS2 requests from your key trading partners without adding the infrastructure. IDEA will exchange set-up information with your trading partner, conduct testing, establish and maintain certificates, and ensure the AS2 connection is always online. Your AS2 and non-AS2 traffic will be visible through both the LENS and the IDX tracker tools so you can continue to monitor your traffic flow and compile valuable traffic statistics on all your EDI documents in one location.

As with your B2B managed services, IDEA’s customer support team can answer your questions about AS2 set-up and maintenance. Please contact your account manager to learn more about outsourced AS2 services hosted by IDEA Exchange.

AS2 (Applicability Statement 2) or AS2 EDI-INT (EDI over the Internet) is one of the most popular methods for transporting data securely and reliably over the Internet. The adoption of AS2 grew exponentially in 2002, due in large part to adoption of the standard by the Retail and CPG industry.

AS2 creates an envelope for a message which is then sent securely, via the use of digital certificates and encryption. This method provides additional security protections that enable users to connect, deliver and reply to data, potentially saving money in network costs, and adding flexibility and control on how the data is utilized or reported.  The US retailer Walmart is a good example of a company who uses AS2 on a point-to-point basis to communicate to each of its suppliers.

With IDEA Exchange, you can trade with your customers via AS2 without the need to implement a dedicated EDI solution. The outsourced AS2 option hosted by Exchange offers many advantages over implementing a dedicated service:

* Comply with AS2 mandates without adding infrastructure, expense and expertise
* No AS2 software, hardware, firewalls, management skills, etc. needed
* IDX does all the AS2 work
* Exchange of AS2 set up information
* Provide testing between your company and your AS2 trading partner
* Access to a help desk to resolve issues
* Real-time document exchange
* Optional translation services
* Often lower cost than implementing direct AS2 when considering the total cost of ownership and risk-avoidance

The most overlooked aspects of dedicated AS2 implementations are initial testing costs for all new trading-partner connections, day-to-day monitoring costs for failed MDNs (Message Disposition Notifications), and recurrent management costs associated with certificate expiration dates. Exchange eliminates these costs among many others for IDEA customers that need to communicate to trading partners through a direct AS2 connection