

A large teal circle is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the background image. It contains the text "Building a modern B2B integration platform" in white, bold, sans-serif font.

**Building a modern
B2B integration platform**



Organizations across industries are embarking on technology transformation programs to engage effectively with the digital economy. They should continuously innovate and make sure that business processes are simplified, agile and scalable to stay relevant in the new-age B2B technology landscape. An organization's capability to quickly on-board trading partners and achieve faster time-to-market is limited due to the presence of legacy B2B platform. Hence, in addition to

providing traditional Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) capabilities of data translation and routing, it becomes mandatory for enterprise B2B integration platform to evolve and accommodate new-age requirements such as API-led B2B integration, product upgrades with zero downtime, and blockchain integration. When the evolution of this platform is limited by the product road map and capabilities, it is imperative to come up with a strategic solution, which gets the organization out of this product lock-in.



Figure 1: Key challenges with the legacy EDI applications.

With frequent technology upgrades hitting their IT platforms, organizations are outsourcing their EDI services to software product vendors. In this way, organizations will worry less about things like - 'When is the next upgrade coming in? How long will it take for the updates to sync in? Will we be able to make sure that business as usual is taken care of during the upgrade?' Also, focus can be more on business critical and strategic initiatives. This model gives some inherent benefits like highly available platform with disaster recovery, product upgrades and transaction-based pricing model etc.

Though the product vendors' managed services commercial outsourcing model looks eye-catching initially, here are the drawbacks it comes along with:

1. Higher total cost of ownership
2. Vendor lock-in and limited provisions for business process customization

3. Delays in change requests and partner on-boarding impacting time-to-market
4. Lack of understanding about organization's overall application landscape

To overcome above challenges and run seamless B2B transactions with disaster recovery feature, organizations should have their modern B2Bi platform hosted on a public cloud environment using the best of breed B2Bi software. A single service provider should manage the platform setup starting from development to implementation to support while providing the benefits of aforementioned product vendor managed services solution.

Below are the key platform features to be considered for a modern B2Bi landscape



High availability



Scalability



Security



Quicker partner onboarding and map development



Real-time dashboards and analytics on transaction data



API-led B2B integration



Adapters to integrate with various enterprise applications

Four dimensions of B2Bi modernization

Cloud platform and product evaluation

Evaluation of B2Bi platform requires detailed B2Bi product comparison, fitment to organization's existing IT landscape and compatibility with their strategic cloud platform. In addition, it will be advantageous if the product has the capabilities on API integration, A2A, managed file transfer, seamless partner onboarding, transaction monitoring and visibility, etc.

Cloud B2Bi platform setup

Once the cloud platform and B2Bi product is chosen, architecture is finalized considering the key platform features mentioned above. Setup and configurations are to be done using best possible integrations with the technology environments. The solution built should enable end-to-end user-friendly transaction visibility and insights to the business and operations teams. Though the cloud platform provides some inbuilt transaction monitoring features, integrate with enterprise-wide monitoring solution. If required, build self-healing functionalities like auto restart of services, automate the alert mechanisms and integrate with IT service management applications.

Migration using accelerators and frameworks

Once the platform is robustly built, migration of the partners and maps from the legacy application to the new cloud platform should be done in a phased manner. It is always ideal to migrate few trading partners as a pilot activity to test the solution features available. Partner on-boarding and map development is a time-consuming step of an EDI migration program. Automating these activities will end up saving time and cost. Maps should be standardized and consolidated without increasing the map complexity to ensure minimum maintenance in the future.

Platform support services

The final dimension is around support services model. Unlike the traditional model, the modern B2Bi cloud platform requires integrated cloud operations service delivery model where B2Bi platform and cloud infrastructure services team up to work in collaboration. Having a matured vendor providing end-to-end managed support services for the platform in a standard service-level agreement based model would facilitate the enterprise IT team to shift focus from support services to the core business functions. These support services include cloud infrastructure, database, B2B application, daily operations and trading partner onboarding. This model would also give the enterprise the capability to make vendor changes in the platform depending on future needs.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the new managed services model provides the organization with a highly scalable and secure modern B2Bi platform along with the benefits of a product vendor managed services model without vendor lock. In addition, the organization gets complete control over the platform to make any changes that can enable quicker onboarding of trading partners and accommodate new-age requirements of business.

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Lingaraju has been with the IT services industry for over 19 years with expertise in application integration, B2B integration architecture, platform evaluation and integration modernization. He has provided solutions to large enterprise clients with complex integration challenges and helped them modernize and simplify mission-critical B2B platforms. In his current role, Lingaraju is responsible for providing advisory, consulting and integration solutions to customers across industry verticals in North America.

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