



# Thirstystone Drinks in the Savings with Automated EDI - Dynamics GP Case Study

## THIRSTYSTONE.

### **Their Challenge: A Reduction in Cash Flow and an Increase in EDI Expenses**

Dependent on their aging EDI system, Thirstystone was experiencing increased EDI related expenses, reduced employee productivity and a slowdown in cash flow.

As a home-grown company which became a successful international leader in its industry, they needed to make an EDI change or be left behind.

The decision to integrate Data Masons EDI with Dynamics GP allowed them to **experience full ROI in just 18 months, while also completing the project under budget.**

## Thirstystone Increases Employee Productivity and Bottom Line with Integrated EDI for Microsoft Dynamics GP

**Thirstystone is a true American success story. Originating in 1989 from its founders' garage, Thirstystone is best known for its line of 100% natural sandstone coasters** which have been made in the USA for the last 25 years and are popular due to their unique moisture absorption and fashion appeal. Today, the company complements its coaster lines with gift and tableware offerings.

### **The Existing EDI Solution was a Problem**

Thirstystone was running Microsoft Dynamics GP and needed a new EDI solution to replace an aging solution that was labor intensive and inaccurate. Integrated EDI was a strategic aspect of their business and EDI transactions comprised 40% of its total yearly sales volume and over 50% of its transaction volume.

The company's management team realized EDI was a significant problem area and needed better automation, reliability and vendor support.

### **Too Complex and Time Consuming**

Overseas competition and growth in EDI-related transaction volume highlighted the need to simplify and automate Thirstystone's EDI, which was too complex and time-consuming. The existing EDI system allowed only one user to be logged in at a time and required manual intervention in many transactions, with errors and delays increasing with business growth.

To exacerbate matters, the User Interface (UI) was not intuitive and required IT involvement in basic data-to-day transaction processing. Training new users was also time consuming and costly.

## Decreased Sales and Escalating Chargebacks

Delays in Advanced Ship Notification (ASN) processing became a particularly thorny business problem because the EDI coordinator had to manually edit the transmissions before the files could be successfully transmitted to trading partners. If not executed accurately within the required timeframe, Thirstystone was assessed chargebacks, which lowered margins and vendor scorecard results, and ultimately top line sales. Thirstystone also managed all mapping configurations. This meant that Thirstystone had to employ a full-time EDI coordinator to make these updates, which was costly relative to their overall EDI processing footprint and pressure on retail margins. To make matters worse, mapping complexity also caused errors that resulted in additional chargebacks.

## Wasted Hours with Lack of Automation

With all the attention on chargebacks and manual intervention, automation was not a top priority, but nonetheless was a bottleneck for efficiency and growth. With the legacy EDI program, a user had to press buttons to initiate and complete processing, which could take hours on busy days. Plus, automated error checking was non-existent; there was no way to set-up business processing rules that would proactively alert the user when mistakes occurred. Thirstystone only learned of these mistakes through chargeback notifications and payment deductions.

## Inaccessible, Unsatisfactory Technical Support

Outside of the EDI solution itself, poor technical support caused additional delays that impacted shipping and cash flow. Thirstystone was rarely able to access a live person via the support line and it was common to receive an initial response 48 hours after the initial inquiry, which delayed time critical shipments and transmissions.

## The Solution: Choosing Experts Certified in Dynamics GP with Deep EDI Expertise

Once given the green light to engage another EDI provider, the key stakeholders evaluated numerous solution providers, including embedded, on-premise and hosted EDI options. Having experienced first-hand the impact the wrong EDI solution provider can have, the evaluation was thorough and factored in technology, reputation and support capabilities.

According to Jim Dennis, Director of IT at Thirstystone, Data Masons stood out among all the EDI providers and distinguished itself with its reputation and unique combination of technology and Microsoft Dynamics GP knowledge.

“The integration model and the ease-of-use of the Data Masons EDI solution was just what we needed.”

-Jim Dennis, Director of IT, Thirstystone



The existing EDI was labor intensive and inaccurate, resulting in extensive chargebacks. Thirstystone management knew they needed to find a better EDI solution.



“When we presented the business case to management for purchasing a new EDI solution, we projected a five-year ROI. However, once Data Masons EDI was operational, we soon realized that we would reach our goal much sooner. **Ultimately, we achieved a full ROI in just 18 months.**

-Jim Dennis, Director of IT, Thirstystone

“Today we can onboard new partners in days which makes our sales department very happy. Plus, we know our overhead is much lower than if we had continued with the prior solution or used a labor intensive webforms option.

### **Saving Money in Unexpected Ways**

Thirstystone was pleasantly surprised by Data Masons EDI and the Data Masons team. Jim explained, “The integration model and the ease-of-use of its Data Masons EDI solution was just what we needed. Data Masons EDI integrates seamlessly with Microsoft Dynamics GP without any GP customizations.

This approach enabled us to get up and running in a matter of days, as opposed to other solutions that would require a lengthy project implementation. We only needed assistance for the initial two partners and when we realized how easy it was, I completed the project myself significantly under budget – something we never expected.”

### **Surprising Process Improvements**

Thirstystone quickly took advantage of Data Masons’ automated packing and labeling system for ASNs, however, the company quickly realized it could be improved. Based on retailer policy guides, some partners required only a single SKU per carton, while others allowed items to be mix-packed. Thirstystone wanted to improve this process by allowing distinct items with the same dimensions to be mix-packed in the same cartons. Data Masons quickly added this feature that enabled fast and accurate packing of orders.

### **Flexible to Meet Changing Mapping Needs**

Data Masons’ extensive library of trading partner maps meant that Thirstystone could eliminate the need to have EDI mapping expertise in-house and instead, invest in improved customer service and business expansion. Jim remarked, “We are happy to let Data Masons manage our EDI compliance and mapping - they do it affordably and responsively. It’s nice to know, however, we could do our own mapping if we decided to take it in-house again.”

### **Simplified ERP Upgrades**

Thirstystone plans to upgrade to Microsoft Dynamics GP 2013R2 and to utilize Data Masons EDI with the new platform. “Compared to the embedded EDI solutions for GP, Data Masons EDI delivers tight integration to GP without customization, which makes new GP upgrades a snap with a nearly zero out of pocket cost for us. Removing EDI disruptions out of the project scope will allow us to maintain focus on the benefits of the GP upgrade itself and not on how EDI customizations will work going forward,” added Jim.

Decoupling EDI upgrades from GP itself has presented many benefits for Thirstystone. The company has been able to take advantage of many EDI improvements and meet customer mandates without having to upgrade or customize GP. “I’ve heard a lot of stories about upgrade problems and GP upgrades driven by EDI partner changes that we’ve simply never had to deal with.”



Thirstystone has seen **tremendous efficiencies** since implementing Data Masons EDI through:

- ➔ Ease of integration and use
- ➔ Increased accuracy and speed of EDI communications
- ➔ Management by Exception for proactive error catching
- ➔ Flexible service levels to manage EDI mapping and compliance
- ➔ Accessible and predictable technical support
- ➔ Simplified ERP upgrades

## Accessible and Predictable Technical Support

Jim said, “Although I know Data Masons EDI very well, I don’t have to answer every question that comes from my team. Data Masons EDI lets me customize the error messages sent to our team members that include instructions on how to resolve issues. It enables me to setup operating procedures in the messages, which is a big time saver for us, especially with new employees. Plus, the Data Masons support team does a great job handling questions so I can focus on other important IT initiatives.”

## Increased Accuracy and Speed of EDI Communications

Delayed transmission of data to partners is a thing of the past for Thirstystone. In addition, valuable audit reports are delivered to Jim’s mailbox each day to make sure everything is running smoothly and no transactions are falling through the cracks. Jim stated, “With our audit reports, we can proactively follow-up on missing functional acknowledgements that alert us to issues before they become problems. We also have a terrific report that tells me if our team has not resolved errors preventing orders to integrate into GP.”

## Well Positioned for Growth

“Lower operating overhead helps us keep our selling prices down, while maintaining margins is an important ingredient for continued growth. We’ve been able to take on new customers without hiring new personnel, which is a key business driver. In addition, we pay nominal transaction charges relative to our old solution. In fact, our partnership with Data Masons enables us to process thousands of transactions with retailers, such as Target and Wal-Mart, with zero transaction fees. We found that this is not possible with hosting-only EDI solutions.”

Jim acknowledged, “The bottom line is that we have lowered our annual expenditures on EDI-related activities while growing our business – that fact alone means our investment in Data Masons EDI has been a great success.”

## EDI Made Simple<sup>®</sup>

EDI is all we do at Data Masons. Embedded EDI providers are often programming companies that work on many different projects other than EDI, which can cause them to lose focus. We are solely focused on EDI.

The nature of using EDI to process transactions requires the flexibility to move and adjust quickly. If a customer cannot move fast enough, this can result in significant chargebacks for non-compliance. With Data Masons, adjusting the configuration of the solution takes a fraction of the time it takes to program new code, which allows customers to be quick and responsive.

For more information about how to put Data Masons EDI to work making EDI simple in your company, **contact us** at **[datamasons.com](https://datamasons.com)**.