

ORDER MANAGEMENT REIMAGINED

AUTOMATING FAX, EMAIL & EDI ORDERS
IN ANY ERP ENVIRONMENT



CONTENTS

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS WHITE PAPER

Introduction	3
How Orders Arrive	4
Order Management Automation	5
Automation Success Stories	6
How Automation Works	7
Turning Fax & Email into a Digital Process	7
Bringing Levels of Efficiency to EDI Orders	7-8
Augmenting Your E-Commerce Portal Project	8
AI-Powered Technology	9-10
Dashboard & Analytics	10
Mobile Functionality	11
Multi-ERP Integration	12
Maintaining a Remote Workforce	12
Conclusion	13
About Esker	14

ACRONYMS TO KNOW

This white paper uses a number of acronyms that aren't standardized across every industry and may not be universally known. Below is a handy resource so that no references get lost in translation. Enjoy the white paper!

AI: Artificial Intelligence

AR: Accounts Receivable

CSR: Customer Service Representative

CX: Customer Experience

EDI: Electronic Data Interchange

ERP: Enterprise Resource Planning

KPI: Key Performance Indicator

M&A: Mergers & Acquisitions

O2C: Order-to-Cash

OCR: Optical Character Recognition

PO: Purchase Order

RPA: Robotic Process Automation

INTRODUCTION

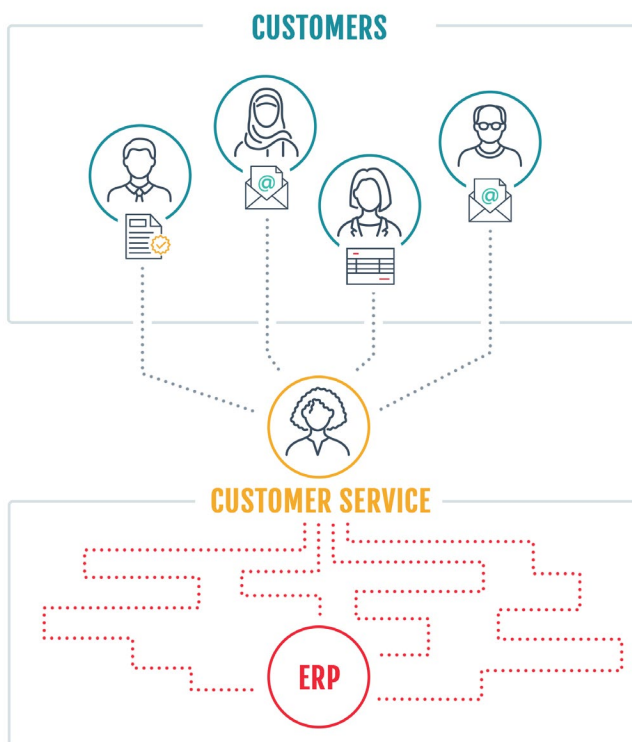
IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S THE PROCESS

Following a once-in-a-generation crisis, many business leaders with ties to supply chain, customer service and sales have been forced to reexamine how internal processes such as order management are negatively affecting cashflow, CX and their company's resilience. This newfound introspection, naturally, begs the question: Wouldn't it be wonderful if every order arrived in the same format and would feed directly into your ERP/business system without the need for keying in data, confirming product codes or clarifying prices?

Alas, we all know the reality of order management. The process is the process: Customers send orders in a variety of channels — some via phone or fax, some via email or EDI and some via XML or e-commerce web portal. The point being, this reality makes it very difficult to imagine a future where "quick," "easy" or "centralized" could ever be accurately used as adjectives to describe the process.

WHY ARE FAX & EMAIL ORDERS SO BAD FOR BUSINESS?

Regardless of an organization's size, industry or ERP environment, manually processing fax and email orders still stands out as one of the more detrimental activities on both an operational and strategic level. This is primarily due to the maze of manual touch points inherent in non-automated environments. Often in these circumstances, the only weapon customer service managers have against misplaced orders, fulfillment delays or incorrect shipments is hope — not exactly a reliable competitive advantage.



They often lead to this:

- Higher order processing costs
- Complex IT environment
- Difficulty processing orders
- Poor responsiveness to customers
- Lack of visibility & process control
- Lackluster CX scores
- More time spent on low-value tasks

Which can result in this:

- Lengthened O2C cycle & slower cashflow
- Damaged customer relationships
- Lower staff morale & higher turnover
- Fewer opportunities for new business & market expansion
- Reduced flexibility & resilience in an increasingly uncertain climate

GOAL OF THIS WHITE PAPER

This white paper aims to reimagine order management through the lens of digital transformation. In the coming pages, you'll learn why more supply chain and customer service leaders are looking to AI-driven automation solutions to eliminate the pains of manual order processing in any ERP environment and, in turn, deliver a number of game-changing benefits to their teams, their customers and their business as a whole.

HOW ORDERS ARRIVE

EXAMINING THE MAIN SOURCES OF INEFFICIENCY

Despite living in a digital age where advanced technology defines so much of our everyday lives, many customers could be accurately described as the antithesis of easily adaptable — instead, preferring to do business via methods that aren't exactly conducive to efficiency or modernization. Tools such as EDI and e-commerce web portals do alleviate some of the pains but, as you will see, even in these seemingly “digital” circumstances, optimization isn't guaranteed.



FAX

Outdated? Sure. Obsolete? Hardly. Nearly 30% of companies report their customers are using fax to place orders.¹ Unfortunately, fax often represents the bulk of a company's order expenses regardless if they are a minority or majority of total sales order volume. Fax orders typically require a separate processing environment made up of fax machines/server software to capture orders and distribute them among CSRs who enter the data into the ERP/business system.



EMAIL

In the interest of going paperless, some companies have started sending POs to suppliers by email. This eliminates paper on the customer side, but on the supplier side, CSRs are still forced to key in the order data just as they might do with a fax order. Predictably, this type of manual work can lead to disruptive errors and, ultimately, keeps customer service professionals from doing what they're actually paid to do (i.e., serve customers).



EDI

In addition to faxing systems, many companies have an EDI system. The question is, how many EDI orders are actually processed without being touched? Orders might arrive in the proper format, but item details could be wrong in the EDI file (e.g., reference, address, price, etc.). If this is the case, the order goes through a complex workflow often involving IT — meaning companies pay two teams to complete one job — before it's entered into the ERP/business system.

WAIT ... WHY NOT JUST OUTSOURCE?

Outsourcing is certainly an option for companies looking to automate aspects of order processing and streamline some of the issues defined above. However, the reality of outsourcing is that some, most or all of your order processing issues are simply passed along to a third party — a third party that often doesn't know your business or share the same customer service values. For example, it's not uncommon for exceptions to be too complex for an outsourcing firm to handle, resulting in orders needing to come back into the workflow. This also can happen with add-ons offered by EDI vendors to translate faxes into EDI.

FORCING EDI ISN'T THE ANSWER EITHER

Unless you're a giant corporation with limited competition, forcing customers to adopt EDI is not a viable option for avoiding the headaches of fax and email order processing. What's more, the cost and technical requirements to implement and maintain an EDI system is another roadblock — despite the standardized nature of EDI, modifications of formats are often necessary to fit an organization's unique needs. Even in the best situations, it's not uncommon for large organizations to have nearly one-third of their orders arriving via fax or email.

¹ Sales Order Processing Trends, April 2019. Gatepoint Research Pulse Report. Sponsored by Esker.

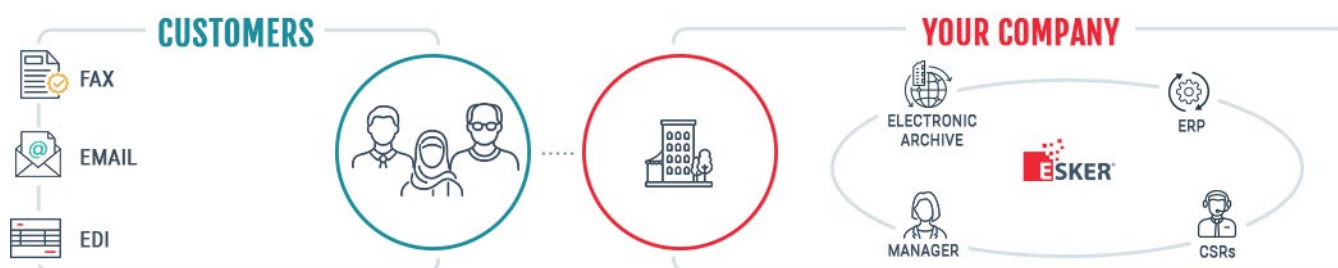
ORDER MANAGEMENT AUTOMATION

SOLVING THE FAX & EMAIL-TO-ORDER PROBLEM

Fax and email order processing requires a solution that can kill two birds with one stone — turning every order electronic, while still allowing customers to send orders in their preferred format (e.g., fax, email, EDI, phone, portal, XML, etc.). Order management automation solutions have the ability to capture all of the necessary data, automatically route it to the appropriate CSR and give full visibility into the process before orders are even entered into the ERP/business system.

EFFICIENCY IN A SINGLE DIGITAL PLATFORM

Automation solves the “maze of manual touch points” issue through a universal, source-independent cloud platform. Every order, no matter how it arrives, is electronically processed, managed and archived, streamlining the end-to-end process and delivering meaningful change to nearly everyone involved.



Greater Speed & Accuracy

An AI-driven order automation solution captures, routes and archives orders as they arrive, helping CSR teams eliminate error-prone data entry and time-intensive order retrieval tasks that slow down shipment and delivery.

Improved CSR Experience

Order management automation empowers CSRs by eliminating data entry and portal fatigue — allowing them to focus on customer-facing tasks while promoting a more fulfilling work experience.

Reduced Costs

Companies that automate order management not only save on operational costs (e.g., supplies, equipment, etc.), they get significant “soft” savings in the form of increased productivity, higher staff retention and lower customer churn.

O2C Harmony

Incoming sales order documents launch the O2C cycle. Digitizing the process not only makes life easier for the customer service and supply chain teams, it benefits AR on the back end, helping to optimize company cashflow.

Increased Control & Oversight

Since all workflow is electronic, real-time order information and reporting KPIs are easily accessible from directly within an automated solution. From managers and CSRs to supply chain leaders and the COO, *everyone* is in the loop.

Enhanced Customer Experience

This is what it's all about, isn't it? Automation allows your customers to continue sending orders via their preferred methods while providing more visibility and autonomy over their ability to track, place and manage orders.

MANAGING SALES ORDERS IN AN AUTOMATED SYSTEM IS 32% LESS EXPENSIVE ON AVERAGE — EQUATING TO OVER \$1 MILLION IN SAVINGS FOR A COMPANY WITH \$2 BILLION IN ANNUAL REVENUE.²

2. Optimizing the End-to-End Order-to-Cash Process, 2020. APQC. Sponsored by Esker.

AUTOMATION SUCCESS STORIES

BENEFITS THAT STRENGTHEN, EMPOWER & TRANSFORM

Although there are countless ways to calculate the value and/or ROI of order management automation, one of the universal yardsticks is to directly examine the results (and words) of other peers and contemporaries. Below are two examples of organizations that achieved great success as a result of their digital transformation initiatives using order management automation.



Background

When Viega, a leader in plumbing and heating solutions, was unable to handle growing order volumes in a streamlined and transparent fashion, the company leveraged an AI-driven order management automation solution to dramatically improve productivity, efficiency and the overall employee experience.

Results



90% of orders now processed electronically



40% reduction in order processing error rate



50% reduction in order processing time (from 10 minutes down to 5)

We started out with people just entering orders all day. Now they have an opportunity to **grow within the company** and we're going to give them **higher level tasks** as we move forward.

DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SUPPORT | VIEGA LLC



CERAPEDICS
Enhancing the Science of Bone Repair

Background

After achieving significant success in a competitive industry (ortho-biologics), Cerapedics turned to an order management automation solution to facilitate faster, more efficient management of its rising order volumes, while seamlessly integrating with its SAP S/4HANA® Cloud application.

Results



Processed **59%** more orders by volume without staffing increases



Achieved **\$300K** in savings after just one year of using Esker



Reduced manual order processing errors by **72%**

What SAP S/4HANA can't do on the front end, automation **fills in the gaps**. It's this type of flexibility that makes it exactly the type of solution today's **med device companies** can benefit from.

GENERAL MANAGER | CERAPEDICS

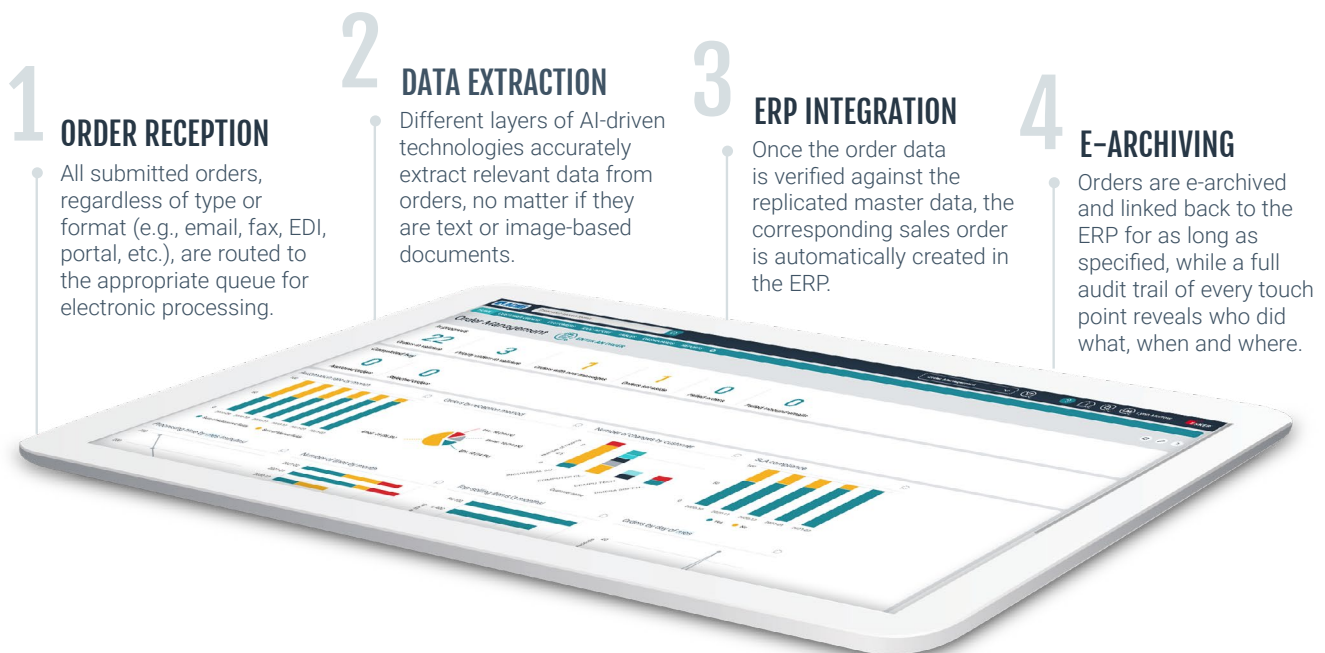
HOW AUTOMATION WORKS

GOODBYE DATA ENTRY, HELLO EFFICIENCY

Automated solutions provide all of the necessary functions and technologies for fast, secure, accurate and transparent order management via one unified cloud platform. Even though your customers may not all be electronically enabled, every order is treated as an electronic transaction.

The solution works by capturing information from a fax or email order, validating that the information is correct, and automatically archiving the order inside the system, while linking the order back into the ERP/business application. Best-in-class solutions go beyond typical OCR tools using AI-driven machine learning and deep learning to ensure accurate data recognition, increase recognition rates over time, and recognize different formats in order to avoid the time and cost of defining and managing countless templates and bring new customers into the automated process quickly.

TURNING FAX & EMAIL INTO A DIGITAL PROCESS



ORGANIZATIONS USING ORDER MANAGEMENT AUTOMATION HAVE EXPERIENCED AN AVERAGE OF 80% FASTER ORDER PROCESSING SPEEDS, 65% INCREASE IN STAFF PRODUCTIVITY AND ORDER DELIVERY TIMES CUT FROM SEVERAL DAYS TO THE SAME DAY.³

BRINGING NEW LEVELS OF EFFICIENCY TO EDI ORDERS

When it comes to EDI orders, exceptions are just part of the deal. And when they happen, it winds up creating a lot of additional work and headaches for CSRs and the IT department. The good news is, order management automation solutions allow companies to elevate EDI from the technical level to the business level without altering existing infrastructure.

3. Transform Customer Service and Operations Through Order Automation, 2018. APQC. Sponsored by Esker.

In regards to the onboarding process, CSRs also have the advantage of onboarding new trading partners in a matter of minutes (versus weeks or even months in traditional EDI environments). This is achieved thanks to the solution's ability to automatically extract most of the EDI data directly while learning the rest along the way.

- Enhance order visibility across all formats and channels
- Reduce the amount of time spent fixing EDI exceptions
- Gain insight into order errors prior to processing
- Quickly search and retrieve orders in the EDI workflow
- Complement an existing EDI infrastructure
- No reliance on IT to fix EDI exceptions

Data Extracted from the Document

Human Readable Format

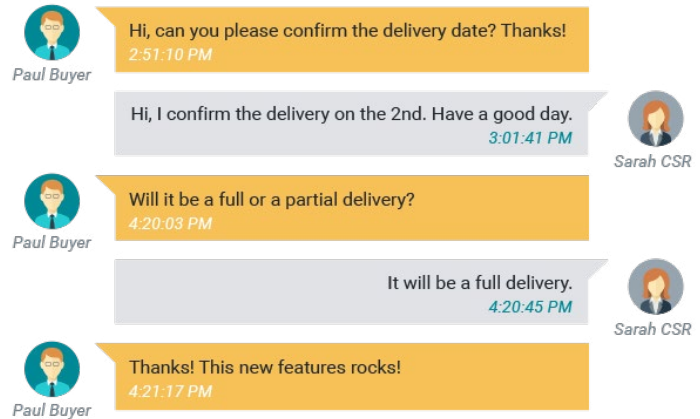
However, simply having an e-commerce tool in place isn't some magic elixir that protects a business against the high costs and inefficiencies of fax, email and EDI order processing. Non-portal orders are still there to be processed and often get overlooked — stressing out CSRs and customers alike. The good news is, businesses of any size can easily augment their e-commerce portal projects with a solution like order management automation, which ensures that every order goes through the same digital interface.

ORDER MANAGEMENT REIMAGINED | 8

ENHANCING CX THROUGH A SELF-SERVICE PORTAL

Customer service teams that are free to focus on activities beyond data entry are able to deliver an exceptional CX that keeps people coming back. Order management automation furthers this by transforming the way customers do business with you by providing them with a self-service customer portal that allows for:

- **Effortless ordering.** Customers can accurately place orders via the online portal directly from your e-catalog of services and/or products. They are also able to reload past orders and save valuable time when ordering the same items on a regular basis.
- **Instant communication.** You and your customers can easily exchange information and chat directly via the portal to quickly clear up any discrepancies or questions.
- **Easy order tracking.** Self-service access to important order information means customers no longer need to call to check on their order status. Customers also have immediate access to past orders, regardless of how they were submitted.



COMBATING PORTAL FATIGUE WITH RPA

Speaking of portals ... many CSR teams are painfully familiar with the term “portal fatigue,” as it’s often their job to retrieve orders from a customer portal. This is an odious task which can take up to 50+ clicks to accomplish, including connecting to the portal, downloading the document, ERP data entry and more. Built-in RPA technology fills in these manual gaps by automatically downloading and confirming order retrieval (in a single click!) and passing it on to the order management automation solution like any other order.

OPTIMIZING EVERY ACTION WITH AI-POWERED TECHNOLOGY

It’s estimated that by the year 2022, investment in AI and human-machine collaboration will boost revenues by 38 percent.⁵ With this in mind, there’s a reason bots are a driving force behind many order management automation solutions — they work. Technologies such as AI not only serve to eliminate manual data entry, which prohibits CSRs in a number of ways, but also enable advantages such as predictive analytics to power greater speed, efficiency and decision making throughout the lifecycle of an order. Some of the more notable technologies and capabilities associated with order management automation include:

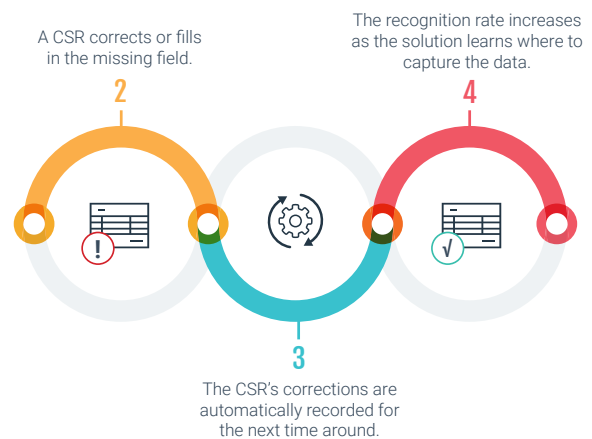
DATA EXTRACTION & FIRST-TIME RECOGNITION

Speed and precision are absolutely critical for achieving excellence in order management. To accomplish this, automation solutions embed intelligent data recognition technology on top of leading OCR engines in order to automatically extract relevant information from sales orders (e.g., PO number, requested delivery date and address, product codes, quantities and prices, etc.).

They also enable something called “first-time recognition,” a type of deep learning designed to optimize header and line item recognition. It does this by utilizing a neural network that’s trained by order sets previously processed in the solution. This all means that good header and line item recognition can be achieved on day one without relying on a ramp-up period for the solution to build its knowledge base or institute taught rules.

AUTO-LEARNING

Of course, nothing is perfect, including first-time recognition. In this case, another powerful AI technology comes into play to fill in the gaps. Autolearning is a type of machine learning that allows the solution to automatically learn from the corrections of its users. Naturally, as its knowledge base increases so, too, does the level of header and line item data recognition and overall automation. If necessary, teaching capabilities can also be instituted directly in the interface to explicitly train the solution on top customers' orders to ensure perfect data extraction.



ANOMALY DETECTION

As stated earlier, speed and efficiency are not the only benefits of utilizing AI within order management. Improved data analysis is another powerful feature that adds even more value to the end-to-end process. This can be achieved through the use of anomaly detection, which works by using neural networks to identify incorrect quantities (e.g., sending 10,000 of something instead of 10). The solution displays a warning for the given product and customer, allowing the CSR validating the order to take the necessary steps to fix the data capture error or contact the customer to see if the unusual quantity is correct/incorrect.

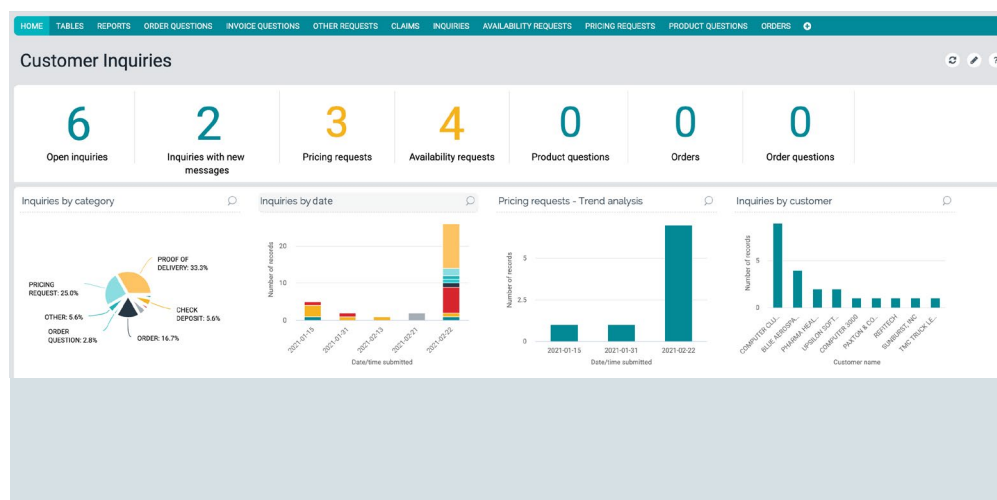
Line #	Extr. material	ERP material	Description	Quantity	UoM	Total
	THX-63972D	THX-63972D	Black bulk toner for model 6397	3.00	PC	71.70
	THX-63974D	THX-63974D	MAGENTA bulk toner for model 6397	1.00	PC	71.70
	CP-102D	CP-102D	8 1/2" x 14" laser paper, 500 sheets	15.00	PC	97.84

Unit 'PC' does not match the material

A "DIGITAL ASSISTANT" FOR THE CUSTOMER SERVICE MAILBOX

From the same interface used to process orders, businesses can also extend AI efficiencies to customer inquiries management and streamline all of the processes involved — from inquiries reception and classification to routing and data analysis.

Automated customer inquiries management is often an add-on to order management solutions because orders are received in the customer service shared mailbox along with other inquiries. AI technology helps identify and route them automatically, ensuring that orders aren't overlooked in the mailbox. The solution's AI functionality also quickly learns how to classify customer inquiries in categories that are specific to each supplier by analyzing the content of the email body and potential attachment.



USER-CUSTOMIZED DASHBOARDS & REAL-TIME ANALYTICS

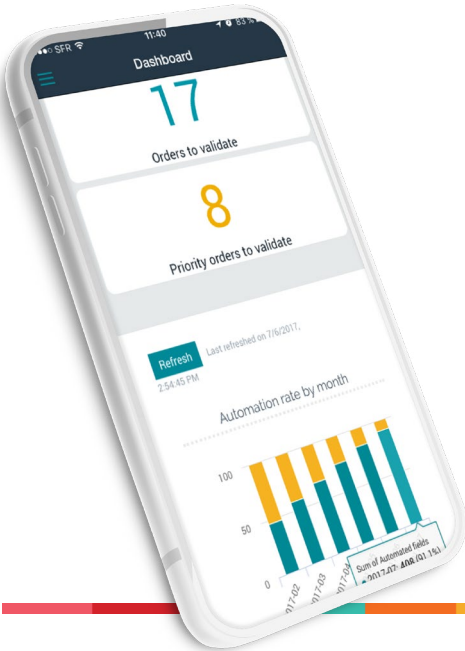
Manual processing methods offer little in terms of packaged KPIs and dashboards, which can provide better organization for CSRs and real-time visibility for managers and executive management. This lack of control and monitoring makes it harder for everyone involved to perform their daily tasks.

This isn't an issue with automated order management solutions, as most come equipped with intelligent dashboards that enable users to facilitate daily tasks, monitor performances, analyze areas of improvement, and allocate resources and workloads.

Dashboards are also customizable so that users can choose what they want to display and to which user or profile. Plus, users are free to remove, edit or add other indicators to their dashboards.



VALUABLE DASHBOARDS FOR EVERY USER		
COO	CS MANAGEMENT	COO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orders per day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orders lines per month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priority orders to validate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value of orders to be validated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orders approved today 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orders waiting to validate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ratio of EDI orders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of lines by user 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Out-of-stock orders
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processing time by CSR 	



MOBILE FUNCTIONALITY

PLACING & TRACKING ORDERS ON THE GO

Another value-added feature that's often "baked in" to many automation solutions is mobile functionality (i.e., the ability for users to access specific data or perform critical actions anytime, anywhere via their mobile device). In the case of automated order management solutions, this contributes to a more mobile, dialed-in and resilient workforce thanks to the ability to:

- Place a variety of customer orders
- Access status updates and links to the carrier's website or app
- Create an inventory report, starting from the items that are supposed to be in stock and instantly matching them

MULTI-ERP INTEGRATION

For many businesses, ERP applications such as SAP, Oracle, JD Edwards, PeopleSoft and Microsoft Dynamics are key tools for standardizing order management operations. The last thing any business would want is for an automation solution to – despite the proven benefits – disrupt the existing infrastructure in any way. Fortunately, many order management automation solutions integrate with any ERP system and provide simultaneous integration with multiple ERPs, simplifying diverse environments resulting from M&A activity. Live connection via web services allows users to check prices, availability and more when processing orders.



**AT LEAST 1 IN 6 EMPLOYEES WILL REMAIN
AS AT-HOME WORKERS LONG AFTER THE
GLOBAL PANDEMIC HAS ENDED.⁶**

MAINTAINING A REMOTE WORKFORCE

Post-COVID, it's very easy to see that optimizing fax and email order processing is not only about how orders are managed, but where. Order management automation solutions provide strong digital foundations for businesses who fall into this camp (or just want to be prepared for if or when the next big crisis strikes).

Order management automation, once again, is a proven solution for meeting this type of challenge. A global cloud infrastructure enables 24/7 availability and ensures business continuity, while aforementioned tools such as mobile applications and customer portals provide peace of mind that every order continues to be delivered in a timely fashion.

⁶ Bartik, Alexander. Cullen, Zoë. Glaeser, Edward L. Luca, Michael. Stanton, Christopher. What Jobs Are Being Done at Home During the COVID-19 Crisis? Evidence from Firm-Level Surveys, July 29, 2020. Working Knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Fax, email and EDI orders play a common yet confounding role within order management. With IT being relied on to fix EDI exceptions and customer service teams hard-pressed to deliver the best possible CX due to their time being spent manually processing fax and email orders, inefficiencies can run rampant. More so, the effects can ripple downstream to many different teams and departments, resulting in poor communication, strained relationships and, ultimately, a business that is unable to meet many of the challenges necessary to compete and survive.

Rather than accept the consequences of manual order management, look to digital transformation solutions that are versatile enough to meet your specific business needs, robust enough to tackle any order no matter how antediluvian the delivery method, and encompassing enough to do it all on a global scale if necessary — even offering solutions beyond just order management. In short, look to automation.



ABOUT ESKER

Esker is a global cloud platform built to unlock strategic value for finance and customer service professionals, while strengthening collaboration between companies by automating procure-to-pay (P2P) and order-to-cash (O2C) processes. Founded in 1985 and used by 6,000+ companies worldwide, Esker operates in North America, Latin America, Europe and Asia Pacific with global headquarters in Lyon, France, and U.S. headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin.

ONE INTERFACE, ONE PLATFORM



MORE FREE CONTENT

WHITE PAPER

The Case for O2C Automation:
Strategies & Insights to Get Your
Business on Board



INSTANT DOWNLOAD

CUSTOMER SERVICE WORKBOOK

How Machine-Learning Solutions Drive
Order Management Excellence: A
Guide for CS Leaders



INSTANT DOWNLOAD



WWW.ESKER.COM

Share this White Paper!

