



Global food distributor makes work easier, effectively serves enterprise customers, and speeds up processes

Number of employees: 45

Website: www.mclaneglobal.com

Country or region: U.S.

Industry: Food distribution

Software and services

- To-Increase Connectivity Studio
- To-Increase EDI Studio
- Microsoft Dynamics

Customer profile

McLane Global, headquartered in Houston, Texas, provides logistics services to the food industry, exports its own brands of food products, and

sources low-cost, high quality goods to regional nonprofits.

Business situation

When third-party logistics became McLane Global's fastest-growing business, the company decided to modernize and enhance its technology foundation.

Solution

McLane Global updated to the most recent version of Microsoft Dynamics and facilitated important integrations as well as process automations and communications with Connectivity Studio and EDI Studio from To-Increase.

At McLane Global, To-Increase integration solutions make it possible to connect systems and simplify communications and processes. They also are effective tools that support process automations and many different applications that involved information transferals.

McLane Global builds on more than a hundred years of business history in the food industry. The company's distribution services have long served leading brands in bringing their products to retailers and consumers. Today, McLane Global provides third-party logistics services from a recently expanded facility near Houston;



Key Benefits

- Simplifies information management and communications
- Enables the organization to produce optimal outcomes from ERP and logistics systems
- Allows a small team to run a global food distribution business and logistics services
- Streamlines logistics management to enable consolidation in a single operation instead of four
- Supports a wide range of diverse usages, such as e-commerce

TO INCREASE

offers a full range of worldwide food export services; and markets food products under its well-known Lady Liberty brand. Another division, the Hunger Relief Distribution Network, helps food banks and nonprofits purchase affordable, good-quality food products for distribution to needful consumers, most of them in the Houston metropolitan area.

New ERP system requires integrations

The fastest-growing business at McLane Global is third-party logistics. To support this service and its customers more effectively, McLane Global upgraded its ERP system to the latest version of Microsoft Dynamics – an implementation performed by Hitachi – and also deployed HighJump logistics software. Hank Morton, Director of Operations at McLane Global, explains, “When we looked for a way to connect Microsoft Dynamics and our HighJump logistics system so they could communicate, To-Increase Connectivity Studio came highly recommended both by Hitachi as well as Columbus.”

McLane Global carefully evaluated the possible options before making a software purchase. “We shopped around for comparable integration solutions and also reviewed what kind of functionality and pricing was available from service companies,” says Morton. “From both the pricing and capabilities perspective, it made sense to get To-Increase Connectivity Studio and EDI Studio and run them within our ERP environment.”

Two days to generating technology benefits

McLane Global implemented Connectivity Studio to achieve the integration of its ERP and logistics systems and EDI Studio to facilitate more efficient electronic data interchange (EDI) communications with vendors and customers. The company deployed and configured the two integration solutions with some remote assistance from To-Increase within two days.

Morton describes, “To-Increase did a great job in helping us implement Connectivity Studio and EDI Studio and understand what we could accomplish with them. We worked through the most likely usage scenarios and learned what steps to take in planning and performing integration projects.”

That approach brought success in building the important ERP and logistics integration and readied the company up for effective use of EDI. “We achieved our initial intent for integration and EDI communications,” notes Morton. “However, the benefit of Connectivity Studio and EDI Studio goes far beyond these purposes.”

Cleaning up the business database

When Morton prepared the Microsoft Dynamics upgrade, he found in the ERP database a great number of obsolete and duplicate records from many years of business history. He says, “Using Connectivity Studio, it



“To-Increase integration technology supports us in accomplishing a lot with very few people. We can automate to a degree that we can spend most of our time managing the business workflows, not the fine details that comprise them.”

Hank Morton, Director of Operations,
McLane Global

TO INCREASE

took me just four days to scrub our entire database and make sure that only current, clean customer, product, and other data would transition into the new ERP system. That would have taken me much longer with the data export module in Dynamics, which is not as easy to use and not as dependable as Connectivity Studio."

Template-enabled data migration

In the next step, data had to be migrated into Microsoft Dynamics. One critical condition in this task was that every customer account was properly tagged with a McLane Global employee. For customers to receive their accustomed level of services and for sales employees to receive their commissions, accuracy was paramount. Use of Connectivity Studio greatly reduced the effort required to complete this task. "Connectivity Studio fosters your productivity," says Morton. "You can rely on templates to simplify complex, challenging assignments. Working in the solution, I performed a complete, error-free data migration to Microsoft Dynamics on my own."

Anytime help you can count on

A consulting systems integration expert from To-Increase assisted Morton during the first uses of Connectivity Studio and EDI Studio at McLane Global. "My contact at To-Increase was invaluable," notes Morton. "He made himself available any time I needed help. Now that I'm much more familiar with the solutions, our conversations range wider and are less focused on the needs of the moment. I plan to continue benefiting from To-Increase's guidance because the consultants are so highly experienced and resourceful."

Following the initial successes in using the solution, Morton says, "We're using Connectivity Studio to automate just about every process we can."

Taking the busywork out of pricing updates

McLane Global's small team conducts business with every major food manufacturer and distributor in the U.S. and is growing domestically as well as internationally. As many as 60,000 store keeping units (SKUs) for food products need to be continuously updated to avoid financial losses in transactions or compromise the quality of customer service. Pricing for many product groups fluctuates several times a week or more frequently, and keeping all product records current was an almost unmanageable task. Employees also needed to reconcile all pricing formats into a single template, recalculating imperial and metric measurements into a single standard.

Morton used Connectivity Studio to simplify this chore. He explains, "In Connectivity Studio, we used a manufacturing template to map data to the format we use in the ERP system. We collect incoming pricing data in a folder, and Connectivity Studio runs a batch job once an hour to perform the latest changes. This saves us many hours of time updating the records manually and resolving any errors made in the process. It's also great that we don't have to touch vendors' transmitted data at all. There is no risk of introducing errors."



"You can rely on templates to simplify complex, challenging assignments. Working in the solution, I performed a complete, error-free data migration to Microsoft Dynamics on my own."

Hank Morton, Director of Operations,
McLane Global

Speaking EDI with enterprises

In addition to integrating the HighJump and Microsoft Dynamics systems by means of Connectivity Studio, McLane Global created integrations with the systems of several key customers. The company also makes broader use of EDI communications.

"We now want as much as possible for customers and partners to use EDI to interact with us," says Morton. "With EDI Studio, this is much more efficient. It makes it easier for customers to use our services, and it enables us to work more productively with the largest vendor and customer companies, where EDI is often mandated as the way you do business."

Convenient communications and e-commerce for food nonprofits

The food banks and other nonprofits that use McLane Global's services to source the least expensive food products of good quality, use a variety of software applications and data formats, including CSV and XML. McLane Global employees rely on EDI Studio to support information exchanges with nonprofit clients. Morton comments, "EDI Studio is much more flexible than the more limited EDI tools that only support the EDI X12 data format. We can process whatever we receive from the not-for-profits, import it into our system, and return information in the same format. This goes beyond conventional EDI and helps us communicate with these customers. Without EDI Studio we couldn't do it."

To make it even easier for food-service nonprofits to find the products they need, McLane Global is about to create an e-commerce portal. Users will be able to see what's in the company's inventory at what prices. "We'll be using Connectivity Studio to export ERP data to an e-commerce site to simplify shopping for the nonprofits," says Morton. "They can then place their orders, which will reflect in our logistics and ERP systems. We will help them assemble entire truck loads this way. Given how flexible Connectivity Studio is, I can think of half a dozen ways to build this functionality – we will just want to verify which is the most efficient."

Accelerated workflows and centralized logistics management

In each of McLane Global's four divisions, integrations and communications realized by using Connectivity Studio and EDI Studio simplify the way employees work. "To-Increase integration technology supports us in accomplishing a lot with very few people," says Morton. "We can automate to a degree that we can spend most of our time managing the business workflows, not the fine details that comprise them."

In the company's logistics services, that means faster processes without the delays that used to happen when product and shipping information had to be recorded manually. It also helps McLane Global consolidate services with great efficiency. Says Morton, "All sales and transactions take place in Microsoft Dynamics and are managed through Connectivity Studio and EDI Studio. With this technology foundation in place, we save money and resources by running a single logistics department instead of four of them."



"We can automate to a degree that we can spend most of our time managing the business workflows, not the fine details that comprise them."

Hank Morton, Director of Operations,
McLane Global