Onboarding and Testing an EDI Trading Partner

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This guide gives best practices for setting up trading partners for your EDI integration. It is intended for system administrators.

Setting up an EDI integration is more complex than other integrations (e.g. WooCommerce, Shopify, etc). The onboarding process requires coordination among four distinct entities: your staff, each trading partner, the EDI provider, and aACE developers. This can make it difficult to estimate timeframes.

Of these four, trading partners tend to have the slowest response time since they typically have less incentive to complete the integration. To help move the process forward, you may need to reach out to a trading partner on behalf of your EDI provider.

The onboarding process consists of several tasks, including:

- Setting up and configuring (https://aace5.knowledgeowl.com/help/setting-up-edi) your aACE+ EDI integration
- Testing the reliability of EDI transfers and the accuracy of EDI files to and from the trading partner
- Training your staff on how to handle EDI orders

Testing the XML Interchange

Testing during the onboarding process involves checking data both before *and after* your go-live date.

Testing the integration involves processing one of the applicable XML documents (https://aace5.knowledgeowl.com/help/understanding-edi#EDIworkflow), then comparing the processed document with the initiating document. Checking the data side-by-side this way helps confirm that everything is accurate. It also helps you become familiar with the tools and procedures you'll need to use when the integration is live.

You should test the integration thoroughly prior to cutting over to a production system. However live data from a trading partner will often include additional details and requirements that were not apparent before go-live. After going to a production system, there may still be details that require adjustments.

Automatic Vs Manual Workflows

Depending on your point in the integration process and your current system configuration, EDI document transfers can be handled with more manual interaction or more automatic processing. Early in the process, you'll be onboarding your trading partners and testing the document exchange (https://aace5.knowledgeowl.com/help/onboarding-and-testing-an-edi-trading-partner). This involves more manual interaction in order to verify document accuracy.

Manually Keying In Data

Difficulties may sometimes arise with the data exchange for an order (e.g. a trading partner requires a correction on an EDI document). You can manually key in data in aACE and in the EDI provider's web portal. Creating orders this way does *not* establish the required data link with the 850.

Manually Triggering a Data Exchange

After the integration is enabled, you can initiate transfers with the EDI provider in the relevant aACE module Admin Actions list. Clicking an Admin Actions option for EDI transfer will send the related document.

If problems occur on an EDI order and you are not able to download the 850, then you cannot use the Admin Actions to trigger document exchanges. Instead you must manually key in the data.

Automated Data Exchange

After the integration is running for a time without difficulty, your system configuration can be updated to automatically handle much of the EDI workflow. You will still need to review orders and complete shipments, but aACE can process a large portion of each overall exchange.

As noted above, if problems occur on an EDI order, you may need to manually key in data.

EDI Test Sequence

The following steps should be conducted for *each* trading partner you work with. The sequence begins when a trading partner submits a purchase order to the EDI provider. Before go-live, this will typically be a PO with sample data for testing; after go-live, it will be an actual PO with real data. The PO is accessible for review on the EDI provider's web portal. The EDI provider then generates an 850 XML document from the PO and uploads it to their

FTP site.

This explanation of testing focuses on using Admin Actions options to move the process along.

1. In aACE, manually query the FTP site for the 850 and uses that XML data to generate an order.
   Data Check: Compare the aACE order to the PO in the web portal. Report any discrepancies to an aACE programmer to modify the field mappings. After the needed corrections are made, manually query the FTP site again to re-process the same 850. Review the generated order for accuracy again.
2. Once the generated aACE order is correct, use Admin Actions to manually upload the 855 to the web portal.
   Data Check: Compare the aACE order to the 855 in the web portal. Report any discrepancies to the aACE programmer. After the needed corrections are made, use the Admin Actions to manually upload the 855 again. Review the 855 for accuracy again.
3. Once the 855 is correct, open the aACE order to generate an aACE shipment. Use the Admin Actions to manually upload the 856 to the web portal.
   Data Check: Compare the aACE shipment to the 856 in the web portal. Report any discrepancies to the aACE programmer. After the needed corrections are made, use the Admin Actions to manually upload the 856 again. Review the 856 for accuracy again.
4. Once the 856 is correct, generate an aACE invoice. Use the Admin Actions to manually upload the 810 to the web portal.
   Data Check: Compare the aACE invoice to the 810 in the web portal. Report any discrepancies to the aACE programmer. After the needed corrections are made, use the Admin Actions to manually upload the 810 again. Review the 810 for accuracy again.

Note: Bear in mind that pre-go-live testing might *not* use real data. Post-go-live testing must also be done to account for variations with more complete transaction data. Follow this same process for testing live data.

Errors in the XML Interchange

Experience from past EDI integrations has shown that there *will* be errors on the early interchanges of every document. Even after orders have been completed accurately several times, it is possible that a variation in a later order will require manual corrections. Sometimes accounting for these variations will require modifying aACE code.

Additional Considerations for Onboarding

Timeframes

Onboarding a trading partner is a slow, iterative process.

Consistent coordination among the four business entities and careful testing is required for getting the data exchanges correct. This effort requires patience because many of the moving parts are out of any single group's control.

Time-Sensitive Orders

During post-go-live testing, you will be working with XML documents for live orders. Some trading partners may set their orders as time-sensitive (e.g. requiring an 855 within 24 hours of when the 850 was sent). However, several things might delay your workflows, including:

- During the testing phase, you might identify mistakes in how the 850 is converted to an aACE order. Adjusting the code to generate documents accurately might take longer than the trading partner's timeframe.
- After a trading partner receives your XML document, they might decide that some data needs to be corrected.
- Errors in the EDI exchange are rare, but possible. These disruptions might prevent the 850 from downloading at all.

When issues like these occur, submitting each document may require a degree of manual entry (see above), depending on the circumstance and where in the process the failure occurred.

Overall Testing Timeframe

It typically takes two weeks of manually initiating document uploads and double-checking XML documents to complete the due diligence process. During this period, new orders in aACE are usually left in Pending status. This requires your staff to manually open the orders and helps ensure they can review them for accuracy.

If orders with errors still show up after two weeks, it's best to extend the test phase and continue initiating EDI uploads manually.

After all the XML documents have been confirmed with no errors for a reasonable time, you can configure the integration so data exchanges are handled automatically.

Onboarding Trading Partners Sequentially

EDI functionality allows you to work with multiple trading partners. However, when setting up your aACE+ EDI integration, we recommend onboarding one partner at a time. This approach often streamlines the process for subsequent partners. The initial partner becomes an investment in understanding tools, identifying data points, and mapping connections. This initial learning curve can help you bring additional trading partners online more efficiently.

During the initial discussions for setting up EDI functionality, discuss which trading partner should be onboarded first (e.g. the most complex, the most simple, the most commonly used, etc).

We understand that some business workflows may not allow a sequential onboarding. If that is the case for your organization, please make sure your aACE partner understands your constraints. They can help you determine the best approach to handle ongoing business requirements as you set up the integration.
