

NetDespatch

NETDESPATCH - PUTTING YOU ONLINE FOR SUCCESS

SPEAKING THE WEB LANGUAGE WILL OPEN BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Many readers of Warehouse and Logistics News will have had experience in the roll out of new e-retailing services as more and more sales come via the web. It is probably fair to say that not all these experiences were good ones! One key problem area is how to match new selling methods with traditional fulfilment services. After all, established systems now run like clockwork after years of refinement and, yes, Internet sales may well throw a spanner in the works.

The issue is integration. Not so much integration of physical processes such as warehousing and delivery, but integration of systems and information. The sales order process needs to be integrated with fulfilment and logistics operations in real-time. The flow of information from order to delivery needs to be seamless and instant, irrespective of the source of the order, the product location, or the method of delivery. In addition, because the order is initiated via a web-based process the expectation is that the customer will be able to watch its progress in the same way.

Although the web has caused logistics teams a real headache, it also can provide the painkiller. New developments in web technology are set to have a huge impact on the way in which retailers, manufacturers and carriers operate. We are all becoming familiar with the use of web services in our everyday lives. Certainly at Amtrak our own Online Collection and Despatch services, provided by NetDespatch, are proving a big hit. Unlike most web based shipping systems, ours are designed to replace traditional PC 'implant' systems - handling high transaction volumes, and printing bar-code labels through standard bar-code printers at high speeds.

The idea of remotely hosted computing and fit-for-all online services is great, but the real power of the web lies in enterprise-wide access to information and the systems integration possibilities it offers. A lot is down to the development of XML; a common web language that allows different systems to interchange data. Use of 'real time' XML requests puts an end to the costly and cumbersome integration associated with traditional batch systems. XML

creates a standard mechanism by which systems can 'talk' and ensures that data is transferred in real time, with assured data accuracy. Other web services can easily be utilised, for instance to check that postcodes are correct, calculate delivery mileages and even to utilise routing algorithms within the delivery process.

Once consignment details arrive onto the web server, that information can be made available to anyone across the enterprise, whether retail customer, retailer, fulfilment operation, despatch point and across the entire carrier network of hub, depots, trunks and drivers. This creates cost-savings at every stage; it improves both despatch and customer service operations, as the information can be accessed from any Internet connected PC, or even from a GPRS connected PDA, scanner or lap-top.

We have seen how this type of leading edge technology can be incredibly effective with our 'Amtrak Connector'; a web-based system that automatically picks up sales order details from other systems at the point of despatch and queues bar-code labels for automatic printing. It eliminates the need to manually enter or import consignments. Developed by NetDespatch, it integrates sales order processing systems with parcel despatch and produces labels - all completely automatically.

Because it is web based, Connector can be used to allow orders to be taken at one location and for labels to be printed on one or more printers elsewhere. Just think about that for a moment. A flower order entered at a call centre in Bristol can output the parcel label at the shipping location in Jersey. Hey presto! It cuts out a whole stage of manual processing and matches order and shipping processes 100%. As soon as the shipping label is printed the flowers can be packed and despatched, and the customer alerted to the delivery time by an automatic 'alert' email.

For order processing systems already outputting a 'shared file' (CSV for instance) for label production, the data is picked up automatically so you can be up and running with a totally integrated operation, in a matter of hours. For web site owners using NetDespatch Xpedite for Actinic, Jshop or Sage shopping-cart software, Connector will automatically import the information.

Utilising all the web has to offer to streamline and re-engineer business processes, can create major reductions in operational costs, through increased productivity, better customer service and improved delivery percentages.



Jonathan Smith Managing Director of Amtrak Express Parcels.



Amtrak is finding that the Internet holds the key to integrating customer and carrier operations

NETDESPATCH DELIVERS COOK FOOD SERVICE ON THE WEB

NetDespatch web services under-pin a new ready-meal home delivery service launched by COOK, the UK's fastest growing premium food retailer. NetDespatch is key to the paperless order and delivery system developed by COOK that feeds their web orders to an overnight parcel carrier, enabling next day delivery of frozen meals.

The new web service has allowed COOK to expand nationally through the website www.cookfood.net, with meals ordered online and delivered to homes throughout the UK. NetDespatch's Velocity Connector application provides integration with COOK's order processing systems and their parcel carrier, giving COOK a paperless and seamless order-to-delivery solution.

COOK's 18-shop network currently covers the southeast of England, where the company has gained a cult-following for its top-quality frozen meals, all hand-prepared by their own chefs from COOK's kitchen in Kent. The new delivery service sees the frozen meals collected by COOK's local courier, Wilson's Express, who deliver nationally through the APC parcel network.

"We awarded the national delivery contract to Wilson's Express and APC because they were the only carrier offering NetDespatch. Without it, the paperwork and administration would have been a nightmare. Now we can expand COOK nationally without having to take on extra staff to deal with orders; NetDespatch has been a really important find for us" said James Walker, IT Manager of COOK.



James Walker, IT Manager of COOK.

Customer orders made on the website are sent to NetDespatch web servers, printing consignment labels automatically at the point of despatch and updating APC's central system. COOK realised that to extend their business nationally would be best served by e-retailing and use of an established next day delivery network.

"With speed crucial to the despatch and delivery operation, we had to streamline the order and despatch process and cut out as much paperwork as possible. Through web ordering and NetDespatch integration between the parcel carrier and our own order processing system, we found an instant solution" said James Walker.

COOK customers enter their own address and order details and using Velocity Connector ensures that this is once-only data entry. Details are transferred electronically via NetDespatch to the APC delivery hub system. Jobs are automatically booked into the network with label details sent direct to COOK's label printers, and manifests by e-mail to Wilson's Express for collection and other APC regional depots handling deliveries.

VIRGIN COSMETICS ONLINE MAKE-OVER

NetDespatch is helping Virgin Cosmetics keep track of deliveries throughout Ireland following the a major contract between Virgin and Transnet, the Belfast-based courier. NetDespatch web services have been incorporated into the Transnet website (www.couriersireland.co.uk) allowing Virgin Cosmetics staff and consultants to check on the delivery status of their orders online.

Virgin Cosmetics sell mainly through a network of 10,000 part time consultants who hold make up parties at a home and more than 2 million women bought a Virgin Vie beauty product in the last year. Through Transnet, Virgin Cosmetics is able to fulfill expansion plans in Ireland, with NetDespatch providing vital system integration and online information to underpin the sales order process.

"NetDespatch produced the web solution that we wanted literally overnight. The next day we were able to show Virgin Cosmetics a complete integrated web tracking service, giving us everything we needed to win the contract" said David Campbell, General Manager of Transnet.



WHAT THEY THINK ABOUT NETDESPATCH

We find NetDespatch extremely useful for the reasons that it is a LOT quicker to book jobs in. Also we get constant email updates which enable us to track our consignments including who signed for it. This system saves us time and gives us more control of our deliveries as all the information we need is in the booking in system

Mark Roberts, Spicer & Spicer Ltd

The on-line booking facility is excellent. It is quicker and easier and the postcode driven database is much better to use. There is no more checking that the address is correct as the system does that for you - you can add or amend the manifest as needed all options that are required for next day are on the same page. I never have to worry about a package not getting to its destination...no gimmicks what you see is what you get...

Nicola, Nickys Nursery

Operationally the ease of use of Quicksilvers online booking system, most notably the multi-user facility and database of addresses, frees up a considerable amount of staff resources and is widely regarded by the team as one of the most beneficial changes that has occurred to the department over the last number of years. Tracking of parcels is made all the more easier by their easy to use website and excellent customer services who unlike the majority of companies are proactive rather than reactive. Overall a gem of a service!"

Brian Cronin, Exam Management Operations, City & Guilds Group

