



## Outdoor Equipment Distributors

Integrating efficiency and customer service with ERP and e-commerce systems



Outdoor Equipment Distributors (OED) is a wholesale distributor of outdoor power equipment for North Carolina, South Carolina, Eastern Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Founded in 1931, the company has grown from selling lawn mowers to providing products from leading outdoor power equipment lines, such as ECHO, Scag, Exmark, Little Wonder, Mantis, Billy Goat, Classen and Grass Gobbler. Currently, OED partners with more than 500 independent dealers, distributing their products and services to both homeowners and commercial users.

Todd Holland is OED's IT and Operations Manager.

### Situation

With a heritage spanning more than 75 years, OED takes great pride in its long-standing commitment to, experience with, and knowledge of the outdoor equipment industry. Yet, over the years as the company continued to grow, it found that many of its business processes didn't scale well, and it became apparent that inefficiencies were holding back the company's further growth.

"We were utilizing old-school distribution tactics, such as taking orders over the phone and through voicemail. Then we moved to receiving orders through fax. However, we have a small team and it was increasingly difficult for us to keep up with the growing demand doing business that way," said Holland. "We moved the sales process online, implementing an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system as well as an e-commerce solution. While that made things much easier for us, it presented all new challenges for our customers."

OED was using an Activant e-commerce solution to centralize its sales inventory and order entry process. The Activant solution provided an easy and seamless way for OED customers to go online and place orders instantly. However, many customers still preferred that OED accommodate their preference for faxing orders. They wanted to continue to fax orders manually as they had been doing all along.

"We were stuck between a rock and a hard place," said Holland. "We had already made an investment in the ERP system and e-commerce solution, and understood their value. But our customers always come first and we needed a way to adhere to their preference for faxing without losing the efficiency gained through technology."

OED sought a software solution that could be positioned between the fax machine and the Activant application to transport the incoming fax documents seamlessly into the ERP solution.

### Solution

Holland looked at offerings from several different software companies, including TeleForm, but it was his pre-existing familiarity with Esker that initially prompted him to check out the Esker DeliveryWare document automation solution. OED had been using Esker Fax since 2002 for outbound fax delivery and realized now that not only would it be easy to expand its relationship with Esker to include the electronic capture of inbound customer orders, but also that Esker offers a solution that could facilitate this without any overhaul of the rest of the existing IT infrastructure.

Esker DeliveryWare provides a single platform for automating the flow of business transaction documents directly into and out of ERP systems and other enterprise applications, eliminating manual order entry and physical document handling.

By February 2006, OED went live with Esker DeliveryWare. Having completed the entire implementation process, as well as the education and training, they needed to learn how to use the product and build rules for document capture and image recognition within a week.

"We were skeptical at first but quickly found Esker DeliveryWare to fit in as an extension of the business. Integration with Activant was a major concern, but we pulled it off without any problems," said Holland. "We are more efficient — less hours are spent manually entering

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Todd Holland ■ Operations Manager ■ Outdoor Equipment Distributors

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Currently, OED receives about 90 fax orders a day, but at seasonal times of peak business the company can receive up to 200 orders a day. Prior to Esker DeliveryWare, it took customer service employees about 5 minutes to process each order into the ERP solution — and rarely could the staff process more than 35 orders per day per customer services employee. Now, as all documents are kept electronic, this process takes only 3 minutes, and the system has the capacity to process thousands in a 24-hour period.

## Benefits and future plans

“The benefits Esker DeliveryWare has brought to our company have been tremendous,” said Holland. “We no longer need to hand-key orders, which has also reduced errors on customer orders significantly. It is such a powerful tool that I know we have only scratched the surface in terms of utilizing its capabilities. It can take information from any document in any form and translate it into anything you want. Basically, if you think about it, it’s doable with Esker DeliveryWare.”

Holland has built 15 rules for incoming faxes and has also used the software to transmit electronic invoices to General Electric. Speeding the transmission process results in OED

receiving faster payment for its equipment — a significant cash flow boost for the small company that sells large pieces of equipment valued in the thousands of dollars.

“I’m a one-man shop here so I just don’t have as much time as I’d like to spend with Esker DeliveryWare. The more things I can do with technology only makes things easier for our customers and our employees,” said Holland. “The technology is consistent, reliable and intuitive. It’s been money well spent on our part because it has all the flavors of document delivery we’ll ever need.”

Looking ahead, Holland plans to build more rules to capture additional customer orders. In fact, he hopes to eliminate all paper documents and the process of hand-keying orders into the Activant solution altogether. Another significant initiative will be to achieve electronic archiving, with the goal of emptying all of the company’s file cabinets currently stuffed tight with paper.

“The business community keeps unnecessarily killing trees with all the paper we use,” said Holland. “I want to reach the point where we do not print anything at all. As we continue to work with Esker DeliveryWare I know this will be something we can accomplish sooner rather than later.”

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