



Ball Horticultural Company

Cultivating customer satisfaction



A private, family-owned company founded in 1905 as a wholesale fresh cut flower operation, Ball Horticultural Company has grown into a leader in every facet of floriculture. Ball is an internationally renowned breeder, producer and wholesale distributor of ornamental plants and horticultural products as well as a supplier of seeds, cuttings, plugs and other horticultural supplies for professional growers worldwide, and has introduced many innovative and award-winning varieties to the world of horticulture. Ball's global family of breeders, seed and vegetative producers, distribution companies, and research & development teams has a strong presence in over 20 countries on six continents.

Mark Morris is Director of Information Technology at Ball Horticultural Company.

Challenge

Ball operates in an industry where documentation is pervasive but automation among customers and suppliers typically is not. Order-to-cash processes involve large numbers of business documents going back and forth, adding up to a mountain of paper.

"We certainly do things like EDI for our key suppliers," said Morris. "But the majority of the customers and suppliers we do business with are burdened by paper. A common complaint we heard was, 'we need the information from you, but we don't want all the paper.'" Ball's customer service staff was manually faxing and mailing nearly 2 million order confirmations, invoices and account statements annually.

The first issue in addressing the situation was how to resolve the varying customer and supplier preferences for receiving documents. "Some people want to have their documents mailed to them," said Morris. "Many in our industry still rely on fax and will for years to come. And then there are those who can and want to have documents sent by email or other electronic means."

Satisfying those preferences consumed internal resources. Setting up fax for a customer or supplier required maintaining information in SAP Output Determination. For email, Ball's data relations department had to go into the customer or supplier file. "In some cases, I'd actually have to involve a programmer to switch documentation types," recalled Morris. Ball recognized the need to put control in the hands of customers and suppliers, and to be able to react to their requests automatically.

Secondly, Ball needed to be able to direct different documents in different formats with different content to different people. A typical customer or supplier has multiple contacts, each of whom may want to receive certain documents and not others. Instead of emailing, for example, all documents to one address, a particular customer or supplier may want order confirmations emailed to an administrator but invoices faxed to the head office and purchase orders sent to the head grower.

Solution

Esker DeliveryWare was one part of a larger project at Ball, which included upgrading its SAP system to ECC 6.0. Ball also retooled its WebTrack Plus customer portal to enhance order management and help customers go paperless, and Esker DeliveryWare became part of that aspect of the project.

"We had looked at some of the standard solutions, even SAP itself, and nothing offered what we needed — a hybrid between contact management and document management," said Morris. "We actually considered writing a solution ourselves, and then I saw a demonstration of what Esker DeliveryWare could do."

Ball and Esker worked together to integrate Esker DeliveryWare output subscription management functionality with the WebTrack Plus portal — and go live on time. Now a single sign-on gives customers the self-service ability to choose electronic delivery and designate recipients for documents including invoices, order confirmations and account statements. Customers also can store and retrieve past invoices and order confirmations, eliminating the need to print and file paper documents.



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Mark Morris ■ Director of Information Technology ■ Ball Horticultural Company

Benefits

Within the first 8 weeks after implementing Esker DeliveryWare:

- Ball was **mailing about 8,000 fewer documents**, which could be 5 to 10 pages each. "We save the time and costs associated with printing, postage, mailing, filing, and internal handling," said Morris. "And this was in response to customer requests, so we're providing them much better service. Improving customer service is our primary objective."
- **140 customers and suppliers** created subscriptions for themselves, allowing Ball to stop printing their documents and start sending them electronically.
- **Mail center workload was reduced** with the ability to merge order confirmations and invoices automatically.

According to Morris, customer satisfaction is the single most important benefit of its Esker DeliveryWare implementation. "By putting this self-service tool into the hands of customers and suppliers, we also reduce internal effort — whether it's my IT staff having to change outputs or our data relations and customer service people having to change the customer file."

Morris added, "At Ball we have pillars that we base our decisions on, called 'Seeds of Success'. One of those pillars is to grow a sustainable future. What we're doing with Esker is right in line with our green business initiatives."

About his experience working with Esker Professional Services during the implementation, and Esker Technical Support afterward, Morris said, "They've been good partners; we ended up modifying our scope quite a bit, and they were very flexible in working with us as the business needs were further defined. And the follow-up by Esker Technical Support has been very thorough in making sure our project is successful."

"Ball and Esker have a partnership," said Morris. "We've done some unique things that benefit both our company and our customers as well as Esker and its customers. It has been a real win-win."

Future Plans

Multi-language capability was a key factor in Ball's decision to choose Esker. "We are an international company, and we'll be rolling this out to our other enterprises throughout Europe over the next 16 months," said Morris.

In addition, Ball will leverage Esker DeliveryWare to automate processing of inbound Accounts Payable documents, which will streamline mailroom operations and link documentation into Ball's SAP system for easy access by Ball sales and customer service representatives.

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