Cloud Based EDI Solution for Small to Medium Sized Manufacturers

About eZCom Software, Inc.
Founded in 2000, eZCom Software, Inc. provides innovative, cloud-based B2B supply chain software solutions including the easy-to-use and streamlined EDI (Electronic Data Interchange) solution, Lingo™**.** eZCom's Lingo simplifies and speeds the trading process, while the eZCom technical support team goes above and beyond customers' expectations, from first inquiry through implementation to fully scalable expansion and sales growth.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: *Ms. Weidner, what is the concept at eZCom?*
Ms. Weidner: We provide a cloud based EDI (Electronic Data Interchange) software solution for small to medium sized manufacturers that need to trade electronically with retailers.

Carol Weidner - CEO

CEOCFO: *What are some of the challenges small and medium size companies face where you are able to help?*
Ms. Weidner: Retailers are under pressure to compete in the global marketplace, which means the faster a product can make it to the selling floor the better. EDI speeds up the supply chain by computerizing and translating purchasing and shipping documents between the vendor and retailer. In order to maximize the effectiveness of EDI the retailer will typically institute an EDI mandate. Our application, Lingo, enables vendors to receive their purchase orders online, and easily create ASN's and invoices, print carton labels and other retailer requirements electronically and accurately.

CEOCFO: *Do you find that many manufacturers are still behind the curve with technology?*
Ms. Weidner: Yes, definitely, because their focus is on their product and they don't realize they need EDI or how to do it until it is time to sell their product to a retailer.

CEOCFO: *How do you bring them up to date without it being too overwhelming?*
Ms. Weidner: We view our relationships with our customers as partnerships and are constantly educating our customers, whether it be the basics of EDI, Lingo training or simply best practices. Although we build many validation systems into our application to ensure compliance, our customers still need to be aware of their retailer requirements and must ship their products correctly in order to avoid chargebacks. We help them do this so their success truly is our success.

CEOCFO: *Are there many companies that provide a similar service to yours, maybe not with the same depth or expertise, but are there many places for manufacturers to look?*
Ms. Weidner: Although there are many EDI companies out there, not all are experts in the retail space. Some retailers include listings of approved providers they have worked with in the past. If not, they sometimes will make a suggestion as to an EDI provider they prefer. Ultimately, though, a retailer will work with any provider – as long as their requirements are met and the provider is easy to work with. We usually come across the same 3 or 4 competitors on a consistent basis.

CEOCFO: *What is it about the eZCom solution that would encourage people to choose you?*
Ms. Weidner: What we offer and what customers really end up needing, which sometimes they do not realize, is a knowledgeable team that is available to them from every department. Sometimes a retailer or customer

request comes up in customer service that requires the expertise of the development team as well as the implementation team. Our groups meet internally to determine the best solution possible. Add that to a great product and our award-winning customer service team that actually take their calls and you have a winning solution.

CEOCFO: *What is the key to training and working with people who are not necessarily technology savvy? How do you make it easy for them?*
Ms. Weidner: We actually walk them through, step by step. We have training manuals, there are webinars, but most importantly, they can call here and they will always get a person that they can work with directly.

CEOCFO: *What is the key for you in hiring people that have the knowledge and the people skills when you are working with non-technology oriented customers?*
Ms. Weidner: We hire people who have some tech background but not always directly in our space. They have to have extraordinary people skills and fit in with our customer-oriented culture. EDI is a very detailed, precise process and, as a result, everyone in the company must also be highly detail oriented. We need to make sure we get it right the first time. The last thing we want is for our customers to receive chargebacks from the retailer.

CEOCFO: *How do you reach your potential customers? How do they reach out to you and how do you reach out to them?*
Ms. Weidner: Currently, they reach out to us because either they are new to EDI or they have had painful experiences with other EDI vendors. We have many customer referrals in addition to many retailer referrals. We recently hired a marketing company to help us refresh our website, gain awareness with social media and assist with some traditional marketing like tradeshows and collateral.

> **"We help manufacturers grow their business by making EDI transactions easy, fast and compliant. And, when there's a problem, our team is always there to help."**
> **- Carol Weidner**

CEOCFO: *What is your geographic reach? Does it matter these days?*
Ms. Weidner: It really does not, not with the internet. We have customers in the United States, Canada and overseas.

CEOCFO: *Do you find the challenges or that systems are the same overseas? Does it make a difference?*
Ms. Weidner: It can make a difference because European and Asian retailers use a different set of data transfer standards. eZCom's thorough understanding of retailer rules ("compliance") for all our retailers sets us apart.

CEOCFO: *Whom are you working with to provide a better offering?*
Ms. Weidner: We are currently working with more ERPs, accounting packages and online retailers. The trend right now is to integrate with outside software packages, so the more you are able to do that, the better.

CEOCFO: *What were some of the challenges in putting the offering together?*
Ms. Weidner: As a Software as a Service (SaaS) based solution, we developed one solution for many customers. We needed to build an application that satisfies not only the retailer requirements but the vendor requirements as well. Over the years we have added many of our customers' requests and additional retailer requirements. Multiply it out for all our retailers, all our customers and integration technology partners and that becomes a lot of flexibility in one software solution.

CEOCFO: *What is your retention rate? I imagine once people start, they stick with you.*
Ms. Weidner: They do stick with us, many for a long time. Our customers and employees develop great working relationships over the years. Nothing is quite as heartfelt as hearing the compliments they give us and how happy they are.

CEOCFO: *How is business these days?*
Ms. Weidner: Steadily growing. It grew throughout the recent recession and due to this past holiday season's online shopping frenzy, our drop ship ("direct to consumer") programs grew exponentially.

CEOCFO: *People are often surprised that there still is so much manufacturing in the United States since everything we hear is so negative. What is your take? What have you learned, working with manufacturers that shows it really is viable, thriving and something to be proud of?*
Ms. Weidner: We watch many of our customers grow. Sometimes they have start trading with one retailer and they add five, ten and even more.

CEOCFO: *What may be different a year or two from now at eZCom?*
Ms. Weidner: We will have integrated with many more ERPs and other technology partners. A comprehensive marketing program will be in place. And, we are hiring!

CEOCFO: *eZCom was recently recognized with a Stevie award for customer service. How do you get to the level? How have you been able to achieve it when so much customer service falls short?*
Ms. Weidner: One of our core values at eZCom is helping our customers succeed. We have a phenomenal customer service manager who has been with us for a long time. We hire very customer-oriented people all throughout the company. It is important they fit in with the company culture not just in the customer service department but throughout our development and implementation groups, too. Customer service is the thread that our employees adhere to when working with both retailers and vendors.

CEOCFO: *Why pay attention to eZCom? What sets the company apart?*
Ms. Weidner: We help manufacturers grow their business by making EDI transactions easy, fast and compliant. And, when there's a problem, our team is always there to help.

BIO: Carol Weidner is living proof of the adage: 'If you want something done right, ask a busy person.' Soon after graduating from Rutgers University with a degree in Mathematics, she opened her own successful business—wholesaling home wares and accessories in the New York/New Jersey area. Carol continued in her entrepreneurial endeavors while she returned to Rutgers full time and completed a second degree in Biology. Following her (second) graduation, Carol learned computer programming and focused on EDI—working for companies serving the retail industry, and consulting for major retailers like Toys R Us. When an opportunity arose to take over a small many-to-many retail portal in 2000, Carol grabbed the reins. She directed the finance and sales side of the burgeoning company, while working together with a team of colleagues who redesigned one of its key products to serve as a web-based EDI application. The result was the B2B supply chain software provider *eZCom*—and the cloud-based EDI solution, *Lingo*.

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