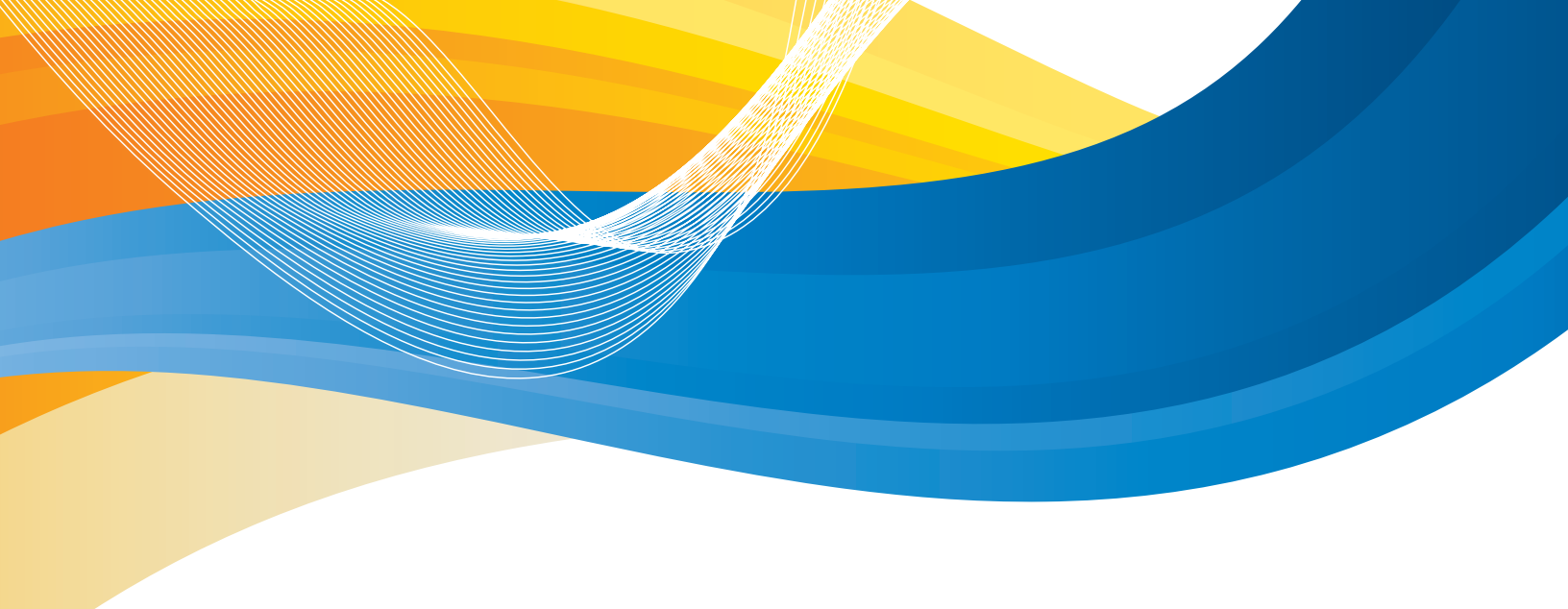# Accelerating Sales:

Providing Distributors Instant Access to Real-Time Supplier Inventory Data via the Web

Supplier Series

With compressed order delivery cycles, buyers need real-time inventory availability data from their suppliers more than ever, placing a burden on buyers and sellers alike.

The Essent® OrderTrax® Inventory Availability Web Service is a proven solution that provides real-time supplier inventory data to downstream eprocurement and order entry systems. Buyers can see supplier inventory instantly, with no need for calls or other communications.

Suppliers implement once, and Essent handles trading partner integration and maintenance on behalf of the supplier without any additional work. OrderTrax Inventory Availability is proven and the fastest and most cost-effective way to for suppliers to integrate with their buyers.

The traditional ways that trading partners – distributors, decorators, and suppliers – communicate inventory is manual. The approach costs the industry time, money, and opportunities. Phone calls, emails, and manual verification sap untold man-hours every day from suppliers, decorators, and distributors alike.

Suppliers are inundated with inquiries about product availability. How many T-shirts are in stock? What color? What size? What price? A supplier representative is on the receiving end, running down answers. It's a time-intensive back-and-forth, repeated order after order, day after day. As the order cycle further compresses, the problem will continue to get worse.

Just as importantly, distributors are looking for inventory information at the moment they're ready to buy. It's the Zero Moment of Truth, and a supplier who can immediately show the distributor what's available has a far greater chance of selling it.

Distributors increasingly expect suppliers to provide instant, online, hassle-free visibility to inventory. And suppliers who don't make inventory lookup easy will remain mired in that time-intensive back-and-forth, or even lose out on sales entirely.

Communicating inventory is ultimately a simple equation. Distributors want the ability to know what's available, suppliers want the ability to say what's available, and both want it to be communicated fast and easy while minimizing labor. Buyers of all sizes, even small progressive customers, want to leverage electronic integration and do so using their method of their choice.

Essent supports both proprietary and industry standards for Inventory Availability web services

and other integrations, including integrations for Orders, Order Status, Invoices, and more, up to and including Automated Order Processing. Essent is an experienced integration services provider, leveraging the promotional products industry-standard OrderTrax Network to integrate on multiple standards including ANSI X12, cXML, ePSA, and PromoStandards™.

The solutions are proven, saving time and creating opportunities for trading partners to develop tighter and more efficient relationships. The uniformity and scalability of Essent integrations make the solutions available to every supplier who wants more efficient relationships within the supply chain.

Supplier: Essent Integration 'Fits in Perfectly' with Award-Winning Service

Beacon® Promotions Inc. in Minnesota was among the first suppliers to go live with the Essent OrderTrax Inventory Availability Web Service.

Beacon is a service-award-winning multi-million dollar promotional supplier within the promotional products industry. Beacon has earned more than a dozen awards for its service to distributors, as well as perfect scores on the SAGE® and Advertising Specialty Institute® ESP™ supplier rating systems.

The Inventory Web Service "fits in perfectly to what we try to do each day" in terms of providing top-rated, award-winning service, Beacon President Gary Haley said.

With the implementation of the web service, the need for distributors to call or email for inventory availability is eliminated, Mr. Haley said. More importantly, he said, distributors instantly have the information they need to make a purchase.

"The real driver is that this is the information distributors are looking for at the time they place orders," Mr. Haley said. "This is the information distributors want to know before starting the order entry process. It's a big deal to offer this information in a timely way."

Due to the demand for real-time inventory availability data, Beacon immediately saw the Inventory Availability Web Service adopted by six of its biggest distributor customers. Due to the success of the rollout, easy trouble-free adoption, and scalability of OrderTrax, Beacon is actively looking to add more trading partners to the service.

> "EmbroidMe wants to provide its franchisees the most comprehensive tools to be efficient, streamline workflows, and improve sales processes. Integration through the Essent OrderTrax Network will empower EmbroidMe stores to sell more, thereby growing consumption, which is what everyone wants."
>
> **Christine Marion**
> **EmbroidMe Retail Director Manager**

Distributor Asks All of Its Suppliers to Integrate via Essent OrderTrax Network

EmbroidMe® in Florida, a Top 15 distributor in the promotional products industry with hundreds of franchise locations worldwide, asked all of its 145 suppliers to integrate via the Essent OrderTrax Network.

EmbroidMe is embarking on a company-wide supply chain initiative to integrate with suppliers via the OrderTrax Network to reduce labor, eliminate errors, and increase efficiencies for both EmbroidMe and its suppliers.

EmbroidMe selected Essent as its official integration and commerce network provider, with Essent managing the integration process on behalf of EmbroidMe.

"EmbroidMe wants to provide its franchisees the most comprehensive tools to be efficient, streamline workflows, and improve sales processes. Integration through the Essent OrderTrax Network will empower EmbroidMe stores to sell more, thereby growing consumption, which is what everyone wants," said EmbroidMe Retail Director Manager Christine Marion said.

EmbroidMe asked the suppliers to integrate Real-Time Inventory Availability in the first phase of the initiative. EmbroidMe also encouraged suppliers to integrate Customer Pricelists, Product Catalogs, Product Configurations, Purchase Orders, Order Statuses, Advance Ship Notices, and Invoices in future phases.

How it Works: Hassle-Free Visibility

Inventory Availability Web Service via the Essent OrderTrax Network works with highly complex and sophisticated inventory systems.

The integration handles inventory of any size, no matter how frequently inventory counts change, and also handles made-to-order products, always-available products, and product matrices, which are common with apparel that's available in multiple sizes and colors.

A supplier -- or a qualified integrator, such as Essent, contracted by the supplier -- can build the Inventory Web Service and other integrations to ePSA, ANSI X12, PromoStandards, or other specifications and standards. Each trading partner uses the integration method that best suits them, and OrderTrax does the rest.

Once Essent builds the integration, the supplier then provides inventory visibility to any distributor or decorator by providing the distributor with credentials.

The credentialed distributor or decorator will visit the service interface and enter a product identification number, typically a SKU. The distributor or decorator optionally can use filters for color, size, or custom variables defined by the supplier.

The service then retrieves the supplier's most recent inventory information and returns the data to the distributor or decorator, showing availability, brand, price, color, size, companion items, a custom message if desired, and a timestamp of the latest inventory update.

The solution allows distributors, decorators, and suppliers to automatically and simply exchange the information they used to spend the most time communicating by phone and email.

Advantages of Integrating through the Essent OrderTrax Network

In addition to allowing trading partners to integrate in their preferred method on a mature, industry standard network, Essent integration services offer a number of other advantages, including:

Uptime Exceeding 99.9%: The Essent OrderTrax Network features greater than 99.9% uptime so trading partners can exchange instant, accurate, hassle-free electronic information when they need it.

Reduced Maintenance Costs: Software maintenance costs such as bug fixes, updates, and security compliance are shared by multiple parties using the third-party provider.

Third-Party Hosting: Using a third-party host like Essent means having a team of experts to address ever evolving security requirements and peak demands, plus experienced professionals to keep the technology optimal.

Experienced Integration Team: Even companies with developers are unlikely to have the extensive integrations experience offered by third-party technology providers like Essent.

Companies want to implement the integration, work through the issues, and keep the software up to date and secure. A third-party technology provider like Essent accomplishes that more cost-effectively than most companies are able to accomplish on their own.

Essent offers a no-obligation, free Integration Assessment for companies interested in implementing the web service.

Essent Corporation
Toll-Free in North America: 800-559-9959
Outside of North America: 1+ 610-559-9999
ordertrax.essent.com