

Project Lead the Way (PLTW)

STEM education innovator makes a quantum leap by moving vital EDI services to OpenText, boosting visibility and reducing EDI operating costs by more than 10%

At a glance

Founded: 1997

Headquarters: Indianapolis, IN

Schools: 12,000+ with PLTW programs

Challenges:

- Wanted to minimize errors and delays when shipping STEM teaching supplies to schools
- Sought to replace time-consuming order-to-cash processes with a streamlined, automated EDI workflow

Solution:

- Uncovered opportunities to enhance B2B integration
- Integrated with EDI and non-EDI partners
- Solved EDI challenges with a smooth migration
- Automated order-to-cash workflows from end to end

Results:

- **Achieved** straight-through processing rates of 99%
- **Reduced** EDI operational costs by 10% a year
- **Secured** a long-term strategic partnership



Created by teachers and led by educators, PLTW provides a world-class hands-on STEM curriculum that gives students a chance to apply what they know, identify problems, find unique solutions, and lead their own learning.

Challenges

- Manual order-to-cash processes introduced delays in providing order updates to customers
- Re-keying order tracking information increased the risk of human error
- Low-quality data on EDI exceptions made it difficult to resolve issues quickly

PLTW believes that all students need access to real-world, applied learning experiences that empower them to gain the skills to thrive in college, career, and beyond. Founded in 1997, the organization specializes in providing a hands-on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) curriculum and materials to schools across the US.

Nick Gentry, vice president of operations at PLTW, said, “We deliver 16,000 programs to more than 12,000 pre-K-12 schools in the United States. Over the years, our STEM programs have helped millions of students get the practical skills they need to excel in college and the workplace.”

To help educators run PLTW STEM programs effectively, the organization offers a wide range of equipment and supplies from its online PLTW Store—including robotics and sensor kits, craft supplies, biotechnology lab experiences, and much more.

“We rely on a combination of drop shipping and third-party logistics to deliver equipment and supplies to schools,” Gentry said. “Electronic data interchange [EDI] is a vital tool to enable us to engage efficiently with our logistics partners and provide timely delivery estimates to our customers.”

“Whenever we call on OpenText for help, they jump on the case straight away—they’re 90% more responsive than our previous provider.”

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Vice President of Operations
PLTW, United States

“We plan to continue our successful collaboration with OpenText to help us bring our hands-on STEM curriculum to more students across the country.”

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In the past, PLTW worked with a cloud-based EDI service to handle many types of data interchange with its partners. However, the company still relied on manual work to manage the order-to-cash process with its third-party logistics provider. PLTW would manually send a list of customer orders to its warehousing provider. Once shipped, the warehousing provider would send back a list of logistics tracking numbers, which PLTW employees would re-key into its systems at the beginning of the next working day.

“Any time we need to manually re-enter data, there’s the possibility for human error,” Gentry said. “To address that challenge, we looked for a fresh approach to B2B integration. As well as reducing the risk of errors in our order tracking process, we wanted to gain deeper visibility into EDI exceptions—helping us to resolve issues faster and offer more efficient, higher-quality services for our customers.”

Solution

By partnering with OpenText, PLTW has achieved greater automation and efficiency for key EDI transactions, resulting in a reduction of manual processes and the associated risk of human error.

Uncovering opportunities to enhance B2B integration

PLTW’s proactive approach to exploring new technologies paid off at a NetSuite industry event. A chance encounter with OpenText revealed opportunities for the company to enhance its B2B capabilities and [deepen its integration with its NetSuite ERP solution](#) by moving away from its existing EDI provider.

“We use Oracle NetSuite as our ERP platform, and our discussions with OpenText at SuiteWorld piqued our interest,” recalled Gentry. “When we started evaluating OpenText B2B integration solutions in depth, we quickly recognized that they were an excellent fit for our requirements. As well as addressing our order-to-cash requirements, OpenText offered far more effective and responsive support than our previous EDI provider.”

Integrating with EDI and non-EDI partners seamlessly

With enterprise-grade B2B EDI integration capabilities from OpenText™ B2B Integration Foundation, PLTW can automate key B2B workflows while gaining greater visibility of its EDI transactions.

By combining the solution with OpenText B2B Integration Essentials, the company can allow smaller, non-EDI partners to share documents via secure web forms. This comprehensive approach strengthens PLTW’s supply chain by ensuring seamless communication with all partners.

Solving EDI challenges with a smooth migration

Working with OpenText Professional Services, PLTW seamlessly [migrated 13 trading partners](#) to the new EDI platform without any disruption to mission-critical business operations.

“The OpenText implementation team was incredibly responsive,” Gentry said. “Sometimes, we’d receive a response in under an hour, and we greatly valued the depth and frequency of their communication during the project. OpenText Professional Services also ran weekly meetings to help us keep track of progress and ensure our partners had sufficient notice about the cutover plan. The go-live went very smoothly, and we were very pleased with the quality of the support we received from the OpenText team.”

Products deployed

[OpenText B2B Integration Foundation](#) ›

Experience enterprise-grade B2B EDI integration for any size business

[OpenText B2B Integration Essentials](#) ›

Quickly become EDI capable with a cost-effective EDI solution

[OpenText Business Network Cloud for NetSuite](#) ›

Streamline your supply chain with NetSuite EDI integration

Services provided

[OpenText Professional Services](#) ›

Have a trusted partner to guide your information management path

Automating order-to-cash workflows from end to end

Today, PLTW leverages a flexible combination of [OpenText B2B Integration Foundation](#) and [OpenText B2B Integration Essentials](#) to support its logistics processes from end to end. The new approach replaces manual order-to-cash tasks with NetSuite EDI automation, enabling the two organizations to exchange warehouse shipping orders (EDI 940) and warehouse shipping advice (EDI 945) automatically.

“We send EDI 940 documents from our NetSuite ERP system to our warehouse logistics provider, and they send back EDI 945 documents with the shipment information, quantities, and tracking numbers,” explained Gentry. “As a result, we can now deliver immediate shipping updates to our customers and practically eliminate the risk of human error.”

Results

PLTW uses OpenText solutions to handle more than 220,000 EDI documents a year with a 99i-percent straight-through processing rate—helping it reduce EDI operational costs by more than 10 percent and offer high-quality services to schools across the country.

Achieved straight-through processing rates of 99%

With [OpenText B2B Integration Foundation](#) driving its EDI processes, PLTW is achieving straight-through processing rates of 99 percent. For exceptions, OpenText provides insightful reporting and responsive support to diagnose and resolve issues faster than ever.

“We process around 220,000 EDI documents a year in total, and the vast majority of those flow through our B2B integration platform with zero human touches,” Gentry said. “We have a lean EDI team, so we want to use our time as effectively as possible. OpenText B2B Integration Foundation gives us exception reports in plain English, which helps us quickly pinpoint and fix issues. Whenever we call on OpenText for help, they jump on the case straight away—they’re 90 percent more responsive than our previous provider.”

Reduced EDI operational costs by 10% a year

As well as significantly improving the quality and responsiveness of support, the combination of [OpenText B2B Integration Foundation](#) and [OpenText B2B Integration Essentials](#) enables PLTW to unlock substantial [operational cost-savings](#).

“As a not-for-profit company, our mission is where our money goes,” confirmed Gentry. “With OpenText, we have reduced our EDI operational costs by around 10 percent, which enables us to redirect investment to our core goal: supporting students with real-world learning experiences.”

Secured a long-term strategic partnership

Looking to the future, PLTW sees OpenText as a long-term strategic partner.

“EDI is one of the key technologies that underpins our day-to-day operations, so it’s crucial that we can depend on our B2B integration services,” concluded Gentry. “We plan to continue our successful collaboration with OpenText to help us bring our hands-on STEM curriculum to more students across the country.”