



## 1-800-FLOWERS.COM

Assuring improvements in business continuity  
with Fax on Demand




For more than 30 years, 1-800-FLOWERS.COM has been providing customers around the world with the freshest flowers and finest selection of plants, gift baskets, gourmet foods, confections and plush stuffed animals perfect for every occasion. With nearly 2,000 agents in seven locations providing customer service, 1-800-FLOWERS.COM offers the best of both worlds: exquisite, florist-designed arrangements individually created by the nation's top floral artists, available for hand delivery the same day, and spectacular flowers shipped overnight.

### Challenge: To implement the next stage of a strategy for faxed order communications to accommodate key seasonal spikes in demand while avoiding unnecessary capacity expenditures

1-800-FLOWERS.COM, established in 1976, is a web and telephone-based floral retailer that has 100 brick and mortar locations in the United States. For years, 1-800-FLOWERS.COM relied on labor-intensive processes for order communication to the appropriate partner (i.e. florist, gourmet bakery) as well as confirmations to the customers. However, this was a highly inefficient process. Each page took up to a minute to transfer, and during big holidays there simply wasn't enough time, fax machines or phone lines. Lags in order distribution resulted in delayed deliveries and a challenge to customer satisfaction.

In 2000, the company responded by replacing its traditional fax machines with Esker VSI-FAX servers. With Esker's help, 1-800-FLOWERS.COM was able to create a workflow process that automatically linked the fax servers with its order process. With seven modems handling traffic and fax machines no longer needing to be manually attended, each document was transmitted at a much higher speed. As a result, the company was able to significantly increase its capacity while reducing the burden to in-house staff.

The company continued to grow. In 2004, 1-800-FLOWERS.COM began a highly successful initiative that significantly increased order volumes. It launched BloomNet, a network of more than 9,000 florists who fulfill orders placed through the company's Website, affiliate network, partners, or a toll-free number. As the network quickly grew, it became a key underpinning of the 1-800-FLOWERS.COM business, and transaction volume rose along with the BloomNet network's prominence in the industry. Some of the smaller partners within the BloomNet network, often "Mom & Pop" shops, however, were not ready to invest in the high-speed computer lines necessary for the BloomNet application. The Esker VSI-FAX servers allowed an accommodation so these smaller shops' order traffic was routed through fax.

As 1-800-FLOWERS.COM continued to grow even more quickly, while the Esker VSI-FAX servers could handle the average day's traffic of about 300 faxes, there were times at which delays would again take hold. The company faces major surges in orders during several key times each year, notably leading up to holidays such as Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Christmas and Easter. During these peak demand periods, the daily volume of orders can increase to as much as ten times over the company's average day. As a result, during periods of high volume getting all the faxes out in a timely manner was a challenge.

To address this problem, the company initially considered purchasing additional fax boards to accommodate increased holiday traffic. 1-800-FLOWERS.COM's internal IT team, led by Marc Grzeskowiak, Director of Logistics Services, determined that it would need to increase its use of modems from seven to 25 in order to accommodate the spike in traffic around the major holidays. The expense of this hardware investment was deemed potentially prohibitive, especially given the fact that the company would not likely utilize the added capacity outside a few key periods each year.

1-800-FLOWERS.COM had been pleased with the performance of the Esker VSI-FAX servers — the capacity issues it was having were more a result of increased order volume fueled by the company's quick growth. That is why initially, it sought to simply add more servers within its headquarters on Long Island in Carle Place, NY.

1-800-FLOWERS.COM needed to get a solution to the problem in place quickly — and certainly in time for Mother's Day, one of the company's key holidays.

 Esker resources were a huge help in getting things up and running.

Marc Grzeskowiak ■ Director of Logistics Services ■  
1-800-FLOWERS.COM



It was just plug and go – it leveraged everything that was already in place.

Marc Grzeskowiak ▪ Director of Logistics Services ▪ 1-800-FLOWERS.COM

## Solution: Fax on Demand from Esker

Esker presented 1-800-FLOWERS.COM with another alternative — one that didn't require the company to purchase a single additional piece of hardware or overhaul its communications infrastructure — called Fax on Demand.

Fax on Demand is a scalable service that helps users send documents directly from enterprise and desktop applications by routing documents to a network of outsourced facilities, where they are processed and faxed to recipients. Flexible pay-as-you-go payment options allow organizations to pay only for what they use on a per-fax basis.

When combined with on-premises Esker offerings like Esker VSI-FAX servers, Fax on Demand serves as a failover option during periods of high demand. Once capacity thresholds have been reached, usually indicated by a pre-determined limit to the amount of time it takes for any fax order to be deployed, additional fax requests are instantly electronically routed to the outsourced facilities, from which they are automatically sent.

With an upgrade to the latest edition of Esker VSI-FAX (5.1) and the use of the included Fax on Demand Connector, the implementation would prove to be seamless and require no new hardware.

"We were a bit wary at first, about taking what we saw as a bit of a chance on outsourcing. But we just couldn't have another sluggish holiday," stressed Grzeskowiak. "Esker also made it a safe bet because it was willing to extend its service level agreement to guarantee that all our faxes would be delivered within 40 minutes, even during peak times, and that it would handle the ongoing process for scaling up and back without us having to change anything on our side."

In mid-April 2005, 1-800-FLOWERS.COM signed a deal with Esker to upgrade to Esker VSI-FAX and integrate Fax on Demand. The Esker team went to work quickly and assured the implementation would be complete by the time Mother's Day arrived in May.

During the Valentine's Day holiday period, thousands of faxes per day were moving through 1-800-FLOWERS.COM's system. During the Mother's Day period after the implementation was completed, nearly double the amount of faxes were processed per day, without a delay. Faxes were dispatched 96% quicker during the Mother's Day holiday than during the Valentine's Day holiday.

"The vast majority of the faxes were delivered in less than 2-3 minutes," said Grzeskowiak. "In the past there would have been no way we would have gotten them all out on time. With Fax on Demand in place by Mother's Day, we delivered a record number of faxes, in record time."

In addition to providing the capacity to meet demand peaks, the implementation also helped support 1-800-FLOWERS.COM's functional redundancy initiative. Esker VSI-FAX also offers the ability to fax via (XML-based) web services, which represents another method by which to access the fax servers at Esker's on-demand facilities, without utilizing the Fax on Demand connector. This redundancy adds another measure of business continuity protection for the company.

## Benefits for 1-800-FLOWERS.COM

"The ability to provide an efficient communication process for all of our customers and florists is absolutely crucial to our business," summarized Grzeskowiak. "And the fact that we did not have to invest in additional hardware or phone lines just to accommodate peak periods makes it that much more of a value."

- Maximized revenue by ability to meet peak order demand
- Fixed cost savings as ability to scale on-demand eliminates need for additional equipment
- Quicker document delivery turnaround
- Improved monitoring of transmission status
- Business continuity assurance

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