

# The Bel Group — Moving Toward Efficient and Ecological Paper-Free Handling with Esker



Created in France in 1865, and operating in Spain since 1965, the Bel Group is a worldwide leader in branded cheeses with operations around the world (36 countries) and more than 12,000 employees. Its portfolio of internationally recognised brands, including The Laughing Cow®, Kiri®, Mini Babybel®, Leerdammer® and Boursin®, as well as some 20 local brands, enabled the Group to generate sales of more than €2.5 billion in 2011.

[www.groupe-bel.com](http://www.groupe-bel.com)

## Food Industry

### Configuration

- ERP: SAP
- Environment: EDI and capturing of order documents and automatic billing from SAP
- Targets:
  - Faster order and invoice management
  - Better relationships with the supply chain and customers
  - Fewer costly operating errors
  - Simplified document management and processing for all non-EDI orders
  - Eliminate need for machines and consumables, reducing environmental impact

The Spanish subsidiary of the Bel Group, a world leader in branded cheeses, selected Esker to automate two of its main document business processes — Sales Order Processing (SOP) and Accounts Receivable (AR). Used by Bel Spain's customer support centre, the Esker solution automates orders and customer invoices. Thanks to the Esker technology, Bel Spain's business processes are now more eco-efficient and encompassed within the company's extensive programme of Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) initiatives.

### Background

In 2010, Bel Spain implemented the Esker solution to automate two of its document intensive business processes in order to increase efficiency and reduce the number of processing errors. The objective was to automate the processing and archiving of 5,000 yearly customer orders (received by fax and email), as well as the sending and archiving of customer invoices in electronic format. With 89% of Bel's invoices sent by postal mail, the risk of lost mail was high and errors required the company to resend invoices several times, amounting to lost time and money. Additionally, Bel required a solution that was fully integrated with its SAP® applications.

### Customer Orders

Bel Spain receives approximately 25,000 customer orders per year — 33% of which are received in electronic data interchange (EDI) format, while the remaining orders are handled by fax, email and telephone, or directly by its distributors. In the past, orders were manually processed by Bel Spain employees via an SAP application or directly by the company's distributors. The company was looking to overhaul its outdated process, increase efficiency and upgrade to an automation solution.

Since solution implementation, Bel has taken an active role in helping customers change the way they send documents, moving from telephone and paper to electronic format (fax or email). Within a year, two-thirds of Bel's orders were being received electronically, 30% by the Esker optical character recognition (OCR) technology.

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Alberto Barbero ■ Customer Service Manager ■ Bel Spain

*"Our customers love having their orders processed electronically — they arrive on time and information is correct", said Alberto Barbero, Customer Service Manager for Bel Spain. Bel's primary objective is to achieve maximum efficiency in business communications by annually increasing the electronic order format adoption rate of its customers and suppliers. Employees in the customer support department confirm that the OCR solution brings greater control and reliability to the automation process, which has an impact on both sales and billing cycles. "The Esker solution provides Bel with significant improvements in the quality of managing order-to-cash and procure-to-pay cycles," Barbero added.*

## Complementary solution to EDI

Bel Spain is a perfect example of how EDI and Esker technology complement one another. Although a majority of Bel Spain's electronic orders arrive via EDI, there is a small but important quantity of these orders arriving from different channels (e.g., fax and email) which cannot be overlooked. Processing these order formats was a constant, time-consuming nuisance for Bel Spain — it was imperative their solution provider be able to handle non-EDI orders.

Seamlessly integrated within Bel's EDI landscape, Esker technology understands and generates orders in the EDI workflow, which are then integrated into Bel's SAP system. Esker has helped Bel Spain automate 100% of the document exchange with their non-EDI partners. *"It was essential that faxed and emailed orders be captured and converted in EDI language for seamless integration into SAP — without SAP knowing if orders come from EDI or from OCR,"* said Barbero. *"Esker was able to meet our need."*

## Accounts Receivable

Thanks to Esker, Bel Spain also automated the sending and archiving of electronic customer invoices. Invoices are now received quicker and easier, and never get lost. Duplicate copies can easily be printed if needed, there is greater invoice traceability, and Bel Spain benefits from days sales outstanding. Additional AR automation benefits include:

- Invoices with electronic signatures are **automatically generated from SAP**
- Signed PDF invoices are **automatically sent by email via Lotus Notes**
- **Electronic invoices are archived online**, freeing-up physical space and decreasing associated costs

### Customer order and invoice automation benefits:

- **Achieved significant financial savings** by eliminating the costs involved with printing and mailing invoices and manual reception and processing of customer orders
- **Decreased order and invoice processing time**
- **Eliminated processing errors associated with manual handling**
- **Streamlined relationships with vendors and customers** by making communication with both more reliable, resulting in faster sales cycles and increased customer loyalty
- **Eliminated physical archiving** by using 115 fewer filing cabinets every year, resulting in an estimated savings of €4,500 per year based on the average price per square meter

## Environmental commitments

This project is incorporated within the Bel Group's CSR policy, designed to reduce the company's environmental impact through eco-efficient management. Extended across the company, numerous activities and divisions are involved: Finance, Sales, Marketing, Supply Chain, Human Resources, production centres and more.

Rewarded with international recognition (member of the UN Global Impact) and certificates (including ISO 14001), the Group's comprehensive eco-efficiency programme encompasses paperless operations in the customer service processes, automated order collection and electronic billing. The company is not only saving trees, but also 10,600 liters of water and 1,640 kilowatts of electricity required to produce the paper that would have been used for non-automated documents. With the elimination of over one ton of CO2 emissions into the atmosphere, the Group has been able to further reduce its ecological footprint.

“By automating the processing of customer orders and the sending and archiving of electronic invoices we have achieved significant time savings. Thanks to the automation of these two strategic processes we are moving toward efficient and ecological paper-free handling.”

Alberto Barbero ▪ Customer Service Manager ▪ Bel Spain