

iv) Interconnects

While the majority of VANs interconnect, it was disappointing that only one overseas interconnect was reported in the survey (GEIS and the U.K. INS network). It is likely that overseas interconnects will take years to develop, as they did in North America.

Forwarders in foreign countries may find that their customers are on a domestic (national) VAN. In this case, they will need to add one of the VANs above that has international capability.

5.3 Functional Issues

Mailbox Features and Processing

While all of the VANs provide basic store-and-retrieve mailboxing of EDI messages, there are three different kinds of functionality, namely:

i) Generic Mailboxing

Generic mailboxing allows all types of messages -- E-mail, EDI, Binary Files, etc. -- to be stored and retrieved. With generic mailboxing, EDI messages are placed in vendor-specific envelopes for transmission to and from the VAN.

The advantage of a generic mailbox is that one mailbox can be used for many different types of messages (which is of most benefit to the VAN). But there are two main disadvantages: special vendor-specific software must be run on the customer's computer to envelope/de-envelope the EDI messages, and the VAN does not perform any validation or processing on the EDI content.

Immedia is best classified as a generic mailbox.

ii) EDI-Specific Mailboxing

As its name suggests, this mailbox is tailored for EDI. The mailbox makes use of the envelopes that are part of the EDI standard message rather than requiring any additional enveloping. EDI-specific mailboxes are not limited to EDI messages; vendor-specific envelopes can be used to move any type of message.