

The key differences between these two alternatives are:

(1) Without a VAN, a company wishing to communicate by means of EDI with a number of different trading partners must establish a complex and sophisticated communication subsystem with skilled personnel to manage the environment.

(2) Without a VAN, the computers of all trading partners are more exposed to external access and possible tampering. Since VANs are, by definition, communications networks, they alleviate the need for individual companies to create their own communications subsystems. Moreover, they provide a much more restricted and secure network. Over and above these considerations, VAN subscribers also benefit from lower overall communication costs; better audit control and traffic monitoring; and access to expert EDI support, assistance and education.

**VANs are in the EDI business because they offer a service superior to direct connect and permit their subscribers to concentrate on their own business while the VAN provides the connectivity to the rest of the world.**

All EDI VANs provide two basic services:

i) **Electronic Mailboxing**

The electronic mailbox simply allows one company to send batches of EDI messages to the VAN, which then sorts and stores the EDI messages in the correct mailboxes until the recipient calls in and retrieves them.

ii) **Communication Access**

All EDI VANs provide some level of local or toll-free access to their mailbox as part of their service. Typically, VANs support a wide range of communication speeds and communication methods or *protocols* associated with personal computers, mini-computers, and mainframe computers.

These two basic services simplify the communications set-up and the daily operation of an EDI system.