Over the past few months we have been asked numerous times about the differences between Integration Manager and SmartConnect. Many of our customers have made the switch and replaced their IM install with SmartConnect to reap all the benefits and extra functionality. We have put together a list of the most common questions and answers for review below:

Q: How is SmartConnect different than Integration Manager?

A: Integration Manager and SmartConnect overlap in terms of base integration functionality in that they can both import data into Microsoft Dynamics GP - but that is where the similarities end. SmartConnect is based on current technology of eConnect and Web Services, while IM is based on data entry Macro's which is both a clunky and very slow way to integrate data. IM is used for just integrations, while SC does so very much more. Despite the massive improvement in functionality, SmartConnect remains cheaper than Integration Manager.

Q: What does SmartConnect do that Integration Manager cannot?

A: SmartConnect provides similar base functionality to Integration Manager, at 50 times the speed. Beyond what Integration Manager provides, SmartConnect also provides:

1. Direct push integration from within Excel
2. Integration links from any ODBC data source as well as XML source, TXT, Excel, InfoPath, CRM , SalesForce
3. SQL lookups to retrieve values you do not have in your data source
4. Drag and drop mapping
5. Templates for email notifications for success and failure
6. Scheduling to run your integrations at times that suit you
7. .NET scripting layer
8. Real-time integrations from GP triggers
9. Broader list of records that you can integrate to within GP
10. Import into multiple databases simultaneously
11. CRM two-way integration
12. Salesforce two-way integration
13. Import into any SQL table regardless if it's related to GP or not
14. Export to XML, CSV and Excel

Q: How much faster is SmartConnect than IM?

A: Our internal testing on the same spec virtual machine has produced the following results:

Test 1
Importing 10,000 Customers into Dynamics GP from the same source file.
Using SmartConnect: 1 minute 30 seconds
Integration Manager: 4 hours 40 minute

Test 2
100 Customers
Using SmartConnect: 2 seconds
Using Integration Manager: 2 minutes 51 seconds

Partner Feedback
The following was not a test performed by eOne, but comes as feedback from one of our resellers when using SmartConnect:
1. GL journal with 100,000 lines in less than 20 minutes
2. Inventory Items – 700,000 items in 1 hour

If you were to perform the same integration with Integration Manager you may well still be waiting.

Q: I used to be able to write VB script in IM, can we do that in SmartConnect? A: You can write more complex scripting as calculated fields, as calls to retrieve a data source, or as pre and post tasks. Rather than VBA, the coding layer is VB.NET or C#. The .NET development layer means that your regular developers are able to work with SmartConnect with the same programming language they use every day.

Q: While IM is a little clunky, it is easy to use. Is SmartConnect really as easy to use?
A: SmartConnect is different than Integration Manager. It is based off different technology and works very differently. You need training on SmartConnect before becoming an expert, but many of our customers have built complex integrations without any training. We do recommend online training as a minimum. Following this training, you will find SmartConnect is very easy to use and also much more powerful as a consulting tool.

Q: Can I use SmartConnect to import data into eXtender? If yes, is that the Microsoft version of GP Extender or just eOne's eXtender Enterprise?
A: Absolutely. eOne has developed SmartConnect nodes for all eXtender objects. These nodes sit behind SmartConnect and can be used to populate all eXtender fields regardless of the version. This means that one single import routine will update the base GP record as well as populate all the eXtender fields.

Q: There are a bunch of modules not supported by Integration Manager – are these available with SmartConnect?
A: SmartConnect supports are wider variety of modules than Integration Manager. Out of the box with SmartConnect/eConnect you can integrate to the modules below with full validation. Beyond this list you can use Node Builder to build integrations to any module and any record you wish.

1. Analytical Accounting
2. Bank Rec

3. Company level data
4. Field Service
5. Lock Box
6. Purchasing
7. Sales Order Processing
8. Human Recourses
9. Fixed Assets
10. Extender
11. PO Processing
12. Inventory
13. Receivables
14. Project Accounting
15. Payroll
16. General Ledger

Q: You mentioned Node Builder – what is that?

A: Node Builder is a companion tool for SmartConnect that will auto-build eConnect nodes for you, for those records that are not natively supported by eConnect. Node Builder does not require coding, but still allows you to build in all the business-level validations you require.

Q: How technical do you have to be to use Node Builder?

A: Node Builder, while being easy to use, is aimed at the experienced GP consultant or GP power user. You need a good understanding of the GP table structure and how records are stored within GP. You do not need to be a developer but you do need to be proficient with GP and how the back end works. Given Node Builder allows you to write to any table, a high level of QA is required to ensure the transactions are being created correctly in GP before these are deployed in production.

Q: With Integration Manager, the entire system seems to stop when the integration is running? Does SmartConnect resolve this?

A: Firstly, SmartConnect runs in so much shorter time you will hardly notice it is running. Integration Manager types all the data into a front end GP screen – which slows things down while SmartConnect is going direct to the database (via all the validation rules). By scheduling SmartConnect to run off Peak – you will never interrupt your team again – and yet if there are any errors, you will be emailed and can let them know.

Q: Tell me about error messages. When my IM fails I can never work out what the error message it telling me.

A: SmartConnect is certainly an improvement on the error messages. Although not perfect, it gives you a much better chance to troubleshoot the issues. Errors are all recorded in the Windows Event Viewer so you can always review what has happened previously and do not have to run the integration again to find the error. Using the post map scripts and templates you are able to email the errors to the appropriate person.

Q: What are Real-Time Triggers – that does not sound like integration?

A: This is where SmartConnect can revolutionize GP for you. A real-time trigger will kick off an integration based upon what you key into GP – and use the record you just entered or modified as the data source for the map that runs. This means you can instantly create other records in GP based upon your rules, or can push data real-time to any other system. If you need two systems to stay in sync all of the time, then real-time triggers are your answer.

Q: You mention using GP data to create more GP data - can you give me an example?

A: Sure – the first scenario is across databases. Let's say you add a new GL account, or Item or Customer or Vendor into a GP company – you can have a real-time trigger immediately push this record into every other database on your system (or selected databases). The second scenario is using SmartConnect to automate your business processes. Take the scenario where you receive a sales order from an international customer – which always mean you create an inventory transfer on your main warehouse and a matching zero dollar order to your subsidiary. SmartConnect can complete both tasks automatically based on the rules you define.

Q: What is a change data source?

A: These are really cool, where you only want to work with records that have changed since you last ran the SmartConnect map. Let's say you have 10,000 customers and you need to push them across to a specific membership system every day. Rather than push all records, the change data source will only pick up new records and records that have changed - and push those across which greatly reduces the integration time and demand on system resources.

Q: I heard that Integration Manager can use eConnect?

A: There are a handful of Integration Manager objects that have eConnect support – but this is only a very small subset of the transaction you may want to integrate.

Q: Something we have always struggled with is getting data out of GP? Can SmartConnect help?

A: Yes – SmartConnect is as equally powerful as an export tool as it is as an import tool. When you run a map you choose the destination for the data. This can be GP as the destination – or it can be Excel, TXT or XML which means when a map runs it generates a file of your required data. You can then pass this file on for import into another system or use by other software. SmartConnect provides the full integration lifecycle of import and export.

Q: What are the competitors to SmartConnect?

A: It is a strange question, but I do get asked it a lot. Really there are no other products on the market that serve Microsoft Dynamics GP customer with so much functionality. Obviously you can use IM to import the old fashion way – but this is more a legacy process than a real competitor. When it comes to CRM and GP integration we do compete with Scribe (and beat it comfortably for ease of use and functionality) but again when it comes to the automation functions within GP and the Excel addin push functions then we are very different products. In short, if you have GP then you need SmartConnect.