

August 2000

## "E-commerce: Wave of the Future or Today's Reality" by Nicole Schultz

E-commerce is the use of telecommunications and computers to facilitate the trade of goods and services while providing sales information, technical data and customer support. The Internet provides businesses with a means for reducing paperwork and administrative lead-time. It offers customers the opportunity to take advantage of more efficient purchasing and provides quicker access to information and data. Procedures, functions and tasks that used to be done manually or over the telephone, can now be done and shared with business partners almost instantaneously.

A web site that is well integrated into the business cycle can offer consumers a wealth of information that previously was not available to them. Customers can see exactly where their order is at any time. This service would provide a builder the option of accessing an existing order from the comfort of their home. Or, once at the building site, builders would be able to access the Internet to get more information about the trusses they are installing.

Even though e-commerce provides many valuable opportunities to industries, a technology revolution in manufacturing has yet to take place. According to a National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) survey, members do grasp e-commerce's massive potential, yet 68 percent of responding companies are not yet using e-commerce as a forum for business transactions. And only 10 percent say their current business process technology systems are fully automated.

A.C. Mendiones (Wood Structures, Inc.) points out the fact that building design challenges and terminology are often different from region to region. That in itself may be an issue that precludes people in the component manufacturing industry from fully taking advantage of e-commerce services. For example, trusses in Maine are being designed to take snow loads of up to 55 pounds, while trusses in Alabama are being designed to deal with 50 to 120 miles per hour winds. Also, manufacturers work with a variety of customers who must adhere to different bureaucracies, building codes and terminology in any given city. Some customers may even be computer-phobic, making any kind of service provided via the Internet useless for some.

While e-commerce might not be on the immediate horizon for many in the component manufacturing industry, it does offer a variety of possibilities as technology continues to evolve. For more information about e-commerce and how it may directly affect our industry visit NAM's Manufacturing Central, launched on March 13, 2000, as a leading one-stop B2B (business-to-business) electronic marketplace on the Internet at [www.manufacturingcentral.net](http://www.manufacturingcentral.net). The service provides a full-solution, affordable way for manufacturers of all sizes to optimize the electronic marketplace.

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