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# From concept to *commerce* in less than 90 days.

Is your commerce platform ready to meet the needs of B2B selling in a B2C world?



# Covering a lot of bases

Like the baseball teams kicking off their seasons this spring, companies involved in B2B e-commerce must cover a lot of bases to win.

But the trek online also raises a lot of questions. One of the first: Will offering customers self-service e-commerce have a positive net effect on business, or a negative one? That question gets to one of the thorniest issues in B2B e-commerce: How do you sell directly to customers online without hurting your traditional relationships with your selling partners, namely your field sales reps and your distributors and wholesalers?

The first article in this series addresses channel conflict, showing how manufacturer Parker Hannifin uses e-commerce across dozens of websites to ease how the users of its products—hydraulic and pneumatic components

used in aircraft and other industrial products—can place orders after choosing among hundreds of thousands of SKUs from 85 manufacturing divisions.

The orders, however, get routed to a distributor who fulfills the order.

Fulfilling orders, of course, is a challenge in itself. For some companies like The Home Depot, which ships to consumers and businesses, fulfillment operations must be flexible enough to move inventory within its warehouses and distribution centers to fulfill high numbers of small orders to individuals as well as bulk orders to stores and business customers.

Taking and fulfilling orders are the most basic of e-commerce operations, but succeeding online takes many other steps and areas of expertise. Companies good at e-commerce do their homework to learn what their customers want, and how they want to shop and place orders. J.J. Keller, which sells materials and services online to help companies deal with government regulations, has developed an e-commerce site and strategy that caters to how its customers need to get product information and order what they need.

National Instruments, a manufacturer of scientific equipment and software, has also improved its e-commerce site to enable customers to buy more products through self-service online



purchasing. In addition gathering information on what customers want to buy online to improve its online merchandising, it got customers to place more orders online for basic products. That freed up its sales reps from spending time helping customers with simple orders, and instead spend more time introducing customers to new product lines and more complex orders.

Other B2B companies like textile distributor AmeriPride have also developed mobile strategies to complement their e-commerce sites, providing customers with a similar buying interface across desktop and mobile devices. It's all about making researching and purchasing easy and consistent for customers, saving them time and helping them buy what they need for their companies.

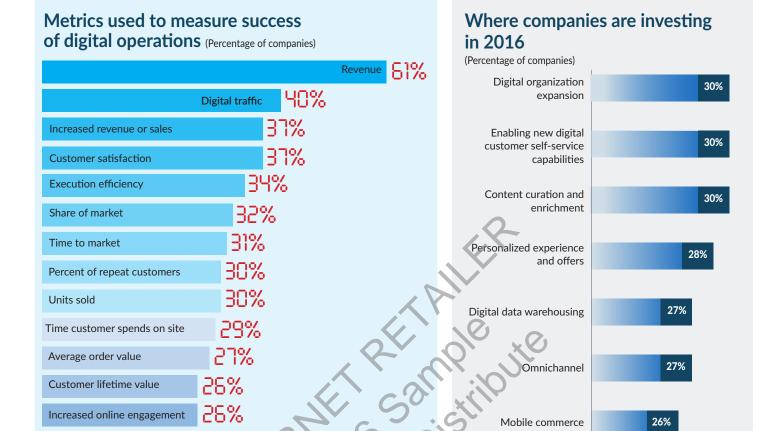
Many companies prefer to conduct much of their purchasing through procurement systems that let them manage what their employees buy, who they buy from, and how much they spend. Computer and electronics manufacturer Dell Inc. offers both an e-procurement system and a sophisticated e-commerce site, helping it to spark e-commerce sales.

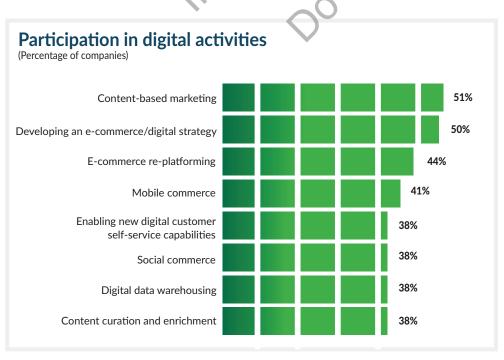
Read about Dell as well as all of the above companies, plus insights from Forrester Research, in this e-book.

**Paul Demery** 

Managing editor, B2B e-commerce

# DID YOU KNOW? Key e-commerce data from B2BeCommerceWorld.com







27%

26%

24%

**Omnichannel** 

Mobile commerce

Social commerce

Average order value

Customer lifetime value

Increased online engagement

Percentage of total revenue attributed to online purchases 23%

The organization does not currently have any digital-specific KPI's in place

# RESOLVING CHANNEL CONFLICT

# Global manufacturer Parker Hannifin fashions a new way to sell online through distributors

#### **By Paul Demery**

With its products manufactured across 85 divisions and sold through thousands of distributors, the company is rolling out a new e-commerce strategy designed to make it easier for customers to buy products from multiple divisions across 52 web sites.

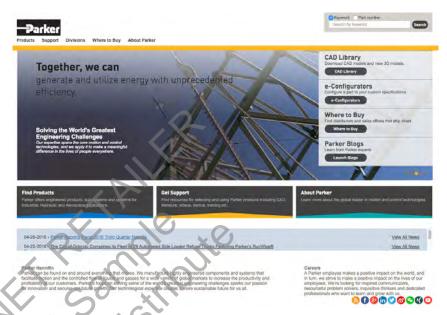
Parker Hannifin Corp. specializes in manufacturing hydraulic and pneumatic components used in products ranging from aircraft wheel assemblies to refrigeration units and industrial pumps and motors. To help its worldwide customers better find and purchase items across its divisions and international markets, it's rolling out a new e-commerce and order management system.

"This is not a technology project; it's what our customers want online," Bob McAdoo, vice president of worldwide business systems, said at IBM Corp.'s Amplify 2015 e-commerce technology conference in San Diego.

Parker Hannifin makes about 900,000 discrete SKUs—a number that grows much larger when including configured products made up of multiple SKUs—and organizes them among more than 6,000 product lines. Its product lines—including items like valves, pumps, filters, hoses and seals—are available in multiple versions from across the company's 85 manufacturing divisions.

Each of those divisions makes its products available through Parker Hannifin's network of 52 international web sites, where customers can request a price quote from the pertinent division and select a distributor. Now the company is also coming out with an online shopping cart and order management system designed to let customers place orders online from multiple divisions.

"This lets us show products from all of our divisions in a single cart," says Alan Gaffney, director of global e-business, who along with McAdoo spoke about Parker Hannifin's e-commerce plans during an Amplify conference presentation. The company is deploying IBM technology including WebSphere Commerce for its online shopping cart and IBM Sterling Distributed Order Management for routing orders to the most appropriate distributor.



The WebSphere Commerce software provides common e-commerce software for all 52 international sites, each of which will be modified for local content. To start out, Parker Hannifin is piloting the new e-commerce site this year with about 25 distributors serving its customers in the United States.

Parker Hannifin's biggest challenge in going forward with an online shopping cart, McAdoo said, was in avoiding channel conflict with its more than 8,000 distributors worldwide. "The worst thing would be to sell direct to customers, and lose credibility with our distributors," he said, noting that the company has had relationships with many of them for decades.

The new shopping cart addresses that by forwarding each online order to a distributor, with the distributor selected by the order management system based on a distributor's product availability and proximity to the customer. If a customer orders multiple products from multiple distributors, "we show by line item which distributor fulfills the order," Gaffney said.

As customers used their commercial credit cards or other financial tools to make online payments, Parker Hannifin will forward the funds to each distributor minus a commission.



# ORDER PROMISING WITH E-COMMERCE

# Home Depot builds out its fulfillment to serve B2B and B2C customers

#### **By Paul Demery**

50% of its customers start shopping online, then go to a store to buy. That and other trends have forced the merchant—which last week won the top honor at the Internet Retailer Excellence Awards—to build more flexibility in how it fulfills orders to business and retail customers.

The Home Depot Inc., which generates about a third of its sales from business customers, is investing in improving online order fulfillment to business as well as retail customers, Scott Spata, vice president of direct fulfillment, said during the B2B Workshop at the Internet Retailer Conference & Exhibition 2015 in Chicago.

In recent years, The Home Depot has introduced several new methods of fulfillment for online orders, including: returning a product to a store, pickup at a store and ship to a store, Spata said. This year, he added, the company is rolling out delivering online orders from stores.

That and other efforts, including building new distribution centers designed for both bulk and small individual orders and launching mobile apps for business and retail customers, led to Home Depot's receiving the top honor in the inaugural Internet Retailer Excellence Awards, which were presented last week at a banquet at IRCE. Home Depot is No. 7 in the 2016 Internet Retailer Top 500, which ranks North American retailers by their online sales.

The merchant—whose business customers are mostly construction contractors that it refers to as "Pros,"—launched last year a distribution center near Atlanta that will primarily handle orders shipped to customers in the southeastern United States. It is the first of three distribution centers—with the other two planned for California and Ohio—slated to open by next year. The three centers together will add a combined total of close to 4 million square feet of warehouse space dedicated to online orders. Each new distribution center will have the capacity to handle up to 100,000 SKUs.

By integrating its online orders with its growing network of distribution centers, Home Depot will save time from order to deliver for its business as well as its retail customers, Spata said.



Customers will be able to get "scheduled delivery, when I want it," he said. He added that a recent internal study found that 54% of Home Depot's online customers have had items shipped to a store, and that of those, 43% make additional purchases in-store when they arrive to pick up their online orders.

The Internet Retailer of the Year award goes to the Internet Retailer Top 1,000 web merchant that demonstrated extraordinary performance in all aspects of e-commerce activity and on all major e-commerce metrics, according to the judging criteria In 2014 Home Depot's e-commerce sales increased 37% to \$3.76 billion, a growth rate twice that of Amazon's. Home Depot also added \$1 billion in web sales last year, with the web now accounting for 4.5% of the chain's sales, noted Rob Hoblit, senior director of product management and the product leader for Symantec's Trust Services Business Unit, who presented the award.



### Finding the value in B2B e-commerce data

#### **By Paul Demery**

B2B pros face their biggest hurdles in using customer and operations data to increase sales and lower costs, Forrester Research says.

To win at B2B e-commerce, get to know your operating data and put it to good use.

The more that companies sell to other businesses online as well as offline, the more important it is for them to monitor and measure performance metrics while setting the objectives of increasing sales and reducing operating costs. But the job of getting, analyzing and using data isn't getting any easier, Forrester Research Inc. says in a new study.

In a fourth quarter online survey of 160 e-business professionals, Forrester found the three most prominent challenges facing B2B managers were:

- Managing business data from multiple sources, including an e-commerce website, mobile site or app, customer contact center, government sources and social media;
- Recruiting and hiring capable experts to analyze that data, and getting support from senior management to support analytics projects;
- Interpreting and sharing that information with multiple departments with a company—for example, so that contact center staff can view the impact of e-commerce sales on the volume of customer calls, and so that a company's merchandising and marketing teams can view the multichannel path some customers take to research and complete a purchase.

Forrester cites that survey in a report issued last week, "Get Your B2B eCommerce Metrics Right," by principal B2B e-business analyst Andy Hoar along with other Forrester analysts.

To sort through these challenges, Forrester advises B2B companies to invest in a strong team of data analysts and to define and organize key metrics that will align with a company's strategic goals. It suggests that companies consider four core objectives: Increasing sales; reducing costs to acquire and serve customers; promoting customer loyalty; and optimizing operations, such as allocating the right amount of marketing funds to online advertising to get the best return on advertising spend.

Forrester also suggests 30 key performance metrics, with advice on how to measure them, divided among those four core objectives. The metrics for each objective include:

- Increasing sales—Average order value, profitability per order, profitability per customer;
- Cost to acquire and serve customers—Average marketing spend per new client company; average cost to retain customers; change (if any) in the number of telephone interactions among online buyers;
- Customer loyalty—A measure of customer satisfaction through customer surveys; average frequency of customer interactions with a company's website and via email; the number of new versus repeat customers;
- Optimized operations—Percentage of online operating budget dedicated to technology; to website design and usability; and to research and development of new products offered online.





# HOW GUIDED SELLING HELPS WITH E-COMMERCE

### A seller of complex products makes it easier to buy online

#### **By Paul Demery**

J.J. Keller is taking several steps to give buyers of its regulatory compliance materials a reason to purchase online.

J.J. Keller & Associates Inc., a family-owned company in business since 1953, sells more than 6,000 products and services designed to help companies learn about and comply with government and industry regulations and operating standards.

More than 420,000 business—including 91% of the Fortune 500—come to purchase materials like compliance manuals, online training courses and assistance in preparing for government audits in such areas as workplace and transportation safety, human resources administration, and handling of hazardous materials.

While helping its customers comply with operating regulations and standards, J.J. Keller has also been working to encourage more of them to place orders on the firm's e-commerce site, JJKeller. com, says Adrienne Hartman, director of e-commerce, government and customer insights. With average order size notably higher through phone orders than through its e-commerce site, the company has taken several steps to persuade more customers to order online, lowering the cost of processing orders and freeing up sales reps from to focus on more complex orders, Hartman says.

The firm recently surveyed 7,500 customers who order offline but not online. Of those customers, J.J. Keller found:

- 70% had visited JJKeller.com within the prior six months;
- Among those online visitors, 60% said they were aware of the online product reviews on JJKeller.com, and 45% had used the reviews in making a purchase decision.

But J.J. Keller also discovered several reasons why offline-only customers said they choose not to buy online:

- They prefer talking with a sales rep;
- Calling is faster and easier than using a web site to get information and place an order;
- They need immediate answers to questions.

The firm realizes that it will never get all of its customers ordering online, Hartman said. "Every customer and every order doesn't make sense online," she said. "Some customers aren't interested; some purchases are too complex."

But it has also identified several ways to bring more customers into online ordering. Although Hartman didn't break out the number of customers or sales booked online, she noted several steps that J.J. Keller is taking to build its online traffic and sales:

- Identify customer buying patterns and e-mail customers when it's time to order more supplies;
- Help guide customers online by setting up an online account for them;



- Allow customers to re-order online products initially ordered either online or offline;
- Provide online live chat service, to let customers immediately interact with a customer service or sales rep;
- Special buying portals designed for individual corporate customers, where buyers can purchase from a microsite with their company's logo a select group of products and prices approved by their employer.

J.J. Keller also provides what Hartman describes as robust site search for helping online customers drill down into product categories, personalized product pages based on customers' past buying history, and web content and purchasing features that are useful on mobile devices as well as desktops.

It also offers product recommendations and cross-selling features. Customers reviewing a web page for electronic as well as paper versions of J.J. Keller's latest workplace safety manual for complying with regulations set by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration, for example, may also see a list of related J.J. Keller guides and periodical newsletters; sets of padlocks for securing gates and industrial equipment; and safety vests and hardhats worn by personnel on job sites.

J.J. Keller operates its e-commerce site on IBM Corp.'s Web-Sphere Commerce technology platform, including IBM Digital Analytics and the Silverpop e-mail management system.

### HOW INSIDE SALES CAN UTILIZE YOUR E-COMMERCE SITE

# A manufacturer of scientific and engineering products grows with e-commerce

The new web site of National Instruments has inspired more customers to buy more products online—and freed up the manufacturer's sales reps to focus on more complex orders.

#### By Nona Tepper

National Instruments, a manufacturer of scientific and engineering equipment and software, recently overhauled its web site to inspire customers to purchase more lower-cost goods online, senior e-commerce manager Nathan Schatz says.

Schatz attributes part of the company's growth to its business-to-business e-commerce site, NI.com, which it relaunched in 2015 on technology from IBM Corp. to replace a 17-year-old site designed and built in-house.

Before the redesign, only a small number of National Instruments' more than 35,000 global customers placed orders online, Schatz says. Because of the complex nature of the company's products, and the limited amount of information the website offered, customers felt more comfortable calling the company's call center to ask questions and place orders, he says. Sales reps dealt with all types of customers, even one-off buyers who purchased only one, lower-cost item for the entire year, he adds.

But with a more user-friendly e-commerce site, National Instruments figured it could get customers to place more orders online for basic, relatively low-cost products, in turn freeing up its sales reps to focus on selling more complex products that carry higher profit margins, Schatz said. "We wanted a better balance between online and offline sales," he said.

As it planned its new e-commerce site about two years ago, National Instruments asked its existing and prospective customers what they liked about NI.com, and what needed to change. The company learned, for example, that customers wanted better product descriptions, images and videos to make it easier to research the site and find the right products.

About 2013, National Instruments began working to replace its in-house e-commerce platform with IBM WebSphere Commerce software, and what Schatz described as a dated in-house content management system with another outside expert Schatz declined to name. The new technology will allow merchandise managers at



National Instruments to more quickly and easily upload a broad mix of high-resolution photos and other images and graphics associated with each product, providing what customers said they needed to make the site more useful, Schatz said. The redesigned site will also feature a zoom tool for viewing details in enlarged product images.

The content management system will also gather data on what products are selling well online and what types of customers are buying. National Instruments uses that data to identify where to expand the company's online offerings. It will also allow for more recommendations of related products.

Schatz says the new features will launch through 2015 and into 2016. With the new site, National Instruments hopes to increase the number of customers shopping on the site, as well as the amount that clients spend per visit.

National Instruments worked with outside vendors including systems integrator Rosetta, customer experience and content development agency Centerline Digital, and Avnet Academy for employee training related to the new web site design.

# A million B2B sales reps will lose their jobs to e-commerce by 2020

#### **By Paul Demery**

Those most likely to lose their jobs take orders for commodity products.

"Business-to-business commerce will never be the same," Forrester Research Inc. says in a report released today that details how the rapid increase in online ordering is displacing many sales reps at manufacturers, wholesalers and distributors.

The report, "Death of a (B2B) Salesman," by Forrester e-business analyst Andy Hoar, projects that 1 million sales reps, or 22% of the 4.5 million B2B sales agents now in the United States, will lose their jobs to e-commerce by 2020.

Among the primary reasons, Hoar says, is that "B2B buyer behavior has changed significantly in the past few years." Nearly 75% of B2B buyers say buying from an e-commerce site is more convenient that buying from a sales rep, and 93% say they prefer buying online when they've already decided what to buy, Hoar says, citing a survey of 236 B2B buyers Forrester conducted with Internet Retailer in the first quarter of this year. Internet Retailer publishes several annual books of e-commerce data as well as other publications as a part of Vertical Web Media LLC, which also publishes B2BecNews.

Most of the lost jobs, Hoar says, will be among sales reps involved in basic order processing, while sales reps that offer higher-end services to help buyers in large corporations order complex products and systems will fare better. "Order takers are the ones in trouble," he says. "It all comes down to value in the ordering process—whether sales reps add value or not."

The report, using figures from the U.S. Department of Labor for the period 2012 – 2020, divides sales reps into the following four categories; the projected loss of jobs over that period declines in an inverse correlation with the level of service a rep offers, with the reps offering the highest value actually growing in number by 10%. Here is a breakdown of Forrester's projections for these four categories:



- "Order takers," who generally process orders that customers could easily place through online self-service. Job loss: 33%, or close to 550,000 out of 1.6 million jobs;
- "Explainers," who provide buyers with more information about complex products. Job loss: 25%, or close to 400,000 out of 1.5 million jobs;
- "Navigators," who help buyers understand what their own companies need to purchase. Job loss: 15%, or close to 150,000 out of 900,000 jobs;
- "Consultants," who have extensive knowledge about the buyer's company to help the buyer understand what her company needs to purchase. Job gain: 10%, to 550,000 from 500,000.

For rester says the biggest impact will be on the overall sales rep staffs at wholesalers and distributors, but less so in such industries as high-tech manufacturers and providers of health care technology.

Forrester indicates that trend toward more self-service online ordering is only likely to increase as more companies that sell to businesses and government agencies get into e-commerce. It notes that "just 25% of B2B companies today actively sell online," and encourages more companies to develop e-commerce sites that provide B2B buyers with the product information, along with search and purchasing features, that let their customers more easily buy online. In many cases for B2B buyers, Hoar says, e-commerce "has taken away the need to talk to someone to explain things."

Another trend contributing to the shift to self-service e-commerce is the increased efficiency online order brings to sellers—for example, through lower employee costs and overall operating expenses, Forrester says. "A company we interviewed estimates that it reduced its cost per order from \$24.48 per transaction via a salesperson-driven paper-based ordering system to \$1.50 per transaction via a customer self-serve e-commerce," the report says.

Forrester also notes, however, that B2B buyers will continue to prefer purchasing through sales reps in certain situations, such as for complex products and systems procured across large enterprises. Yet even in these situations, communications between buyer and reps are going more digital, Hoar says. "They're increasingly conducting those negotiations with salespeople by way of digital means such as email, [live] chat, and collaborative software as opposed to via a traditional phone call," the report says.



# Fabric distributor Trivantage stitches together a new mobile B2B site

#### By Nona Tepper

After growing online for three years, Trivantage is trying a new mobile strategy designed to appeal to customers in the field.

Trivantage, a distributor of stain- and sun-resistant fabric and related supplies, relaunched its B2B e-commerce site early this year to better serve on-the-go customers browsing and ordering on smartphones and tablets.

Many of the distributor's customers need to place orders when they're away from the office computer, such as when a contractor needs to order fabric while at a customer's porch doing an estimate for an awning installation. "The days of faxing your order in, or sitting at a desktop computer with a dog-eared catalog and Post-It notes to mark the product pages you like have changed," Keith Wood, director of e-commerce, says. "Many of our customers use tablets or phones when they're out on the job to show the consumer the different fabrics available."

The new e-commerce site is built using responsive design techniques, so that a single website can display differently depending on the size of the screen the visitor is using. That means companies like Trivantage can maintain a single set of website code and still accommodate customers using computers, smartphones and tablets.

The new site also offers faceted search, which allows customers to select the attributes most important to them when searching for a product. If an architect is looking for awning fabric that must be blue, striped and from the Sunbrella brand, for example, she can click those attributes in a navigation bar that appears with site search results to find the most appropriate products among the site's 9,000 SKUs. "So many consumers have been using faceted search on so many websites for years now," Woods says. "Our customers are busy and operating on time constraints. With the new search features they can filter and facet products by color, brand, width and more."

Since last month's introduction of the new version of the website, the number of visitors coming from mobile or tablet devices has doubled to about 10% of total traffic, up from 5% a year ago, Wood says. That amounts to 2,500 monthly website visitors arriving at Trivantage.com from a mobile device, as the site attracts 25,000 monthly visitors. "Once we get into the meat of the busy season after Easter, and the word gets out that we have that responsive design, the numbers will get even bigger, to maybe 40% of our traffic coming from a mobile device," Wood says.

The new site employs an upgraded version of IBM Commerce e-commerce software, which Trivantage first deployed when it revamped its e-commerce site in 2013. Web design and development firm BlueSky Technology Partners helped implement the new site.

Since introducing the IBM technology, which replaced an internally built e-commerce system, in 2013 Trivantage has increased its online sales to 40% of total revenue, up from 22%. The company attributes part of its success to providing same-day shipping to its 18,000 active customers, which operate in several industries, including awning and marine fabrication, architecture, sign manufacturing, digital printing and upholstery. "Our customers are primarily mom-and-pops that don't have the financial or real estate assets to have any inventory, and manage their business from project to project," Wood says. "It's critical to them to have everything they need to start an awning installation within two to three days after an order is placed. Over 80% of our orders are shipped same-day."

Wood declines to comment on the cost to relaunch IBM Commerce. Trivantage is owned by Glen Raven Inc., a fabric manufacturing and marketing company headquartered in North Carolina.





#### BEST PRACTICES IN BUILDING AN E-COMMERCE PLATFORM

### Dell rewires its e-commerce platform to spark B2B growth

#### By Mark Brohan

In an effort to gain an advantage over rivals selling computer gear and services online, Dell has spent the past two years updating its global e-commerce platform.

Using updated e-commerce technology to offer business buyers an easier way to buy computer gear and services is a top priority for Dell Inc., CIO Paul Walsh says.

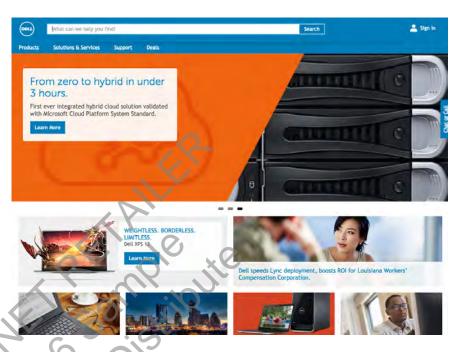
Today Dell generates annual e-commerce sales of about \$15 billion, of which an estimated three-fourths—or just over \$11 billion—is generated by selling to businesses, the company says. But selling computer gear and related services online to both enterprises and consumers can be a highly competitive business, Walsh says.

To give Dell an advantage over manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers also selling computer gear and services online, Dell has spent the past two years updating its global e-commerce platform. That includes PremierConnect, a web-

based procurement system used by more than 1,500 Dell business customers to customize orders, shop a catalog with pre-negotiated pricing, create order requisitions and online invoices, and connect via a secure web link from Dell.com directly into a customer's enterprise resource planning system for updating inventory and financial records.

But buying any computer gear or service can be complicated, especially for large companies placing big web orders. Dell's newly updated e-commerce platform, which the company rolled out in the U.S. over much of 2015 and plans to extend to the rest of the world by mid-2016, features better and faster site search and improved product recommendations, Walsh says.

The updated e-commerce platform also gives B2B buyers access to current inventory data to see if a product is in stock, assemble customized products for immediate purchase online or add to a list and save for checkout at an earlier date. "At the end



of the day we are trying to make buying easier," Walsh says.

For example if a large business customer is using Dell.com or Dell PremierConnect to purchase a large number of new servers, the new Dell e-commerce platform now includes options that let that customer ship to multiple addresses, customize server hardware based on specific technical information and receive related product recommendations. "If a large enterprise is buying multiple servers, one feature on our updated e-commerce platform may recommend what type of software they need for the upgrade or the right type of cables," Walsh says.

Dell sees better web technology and a streamlined and personalized online buying experience for business customers as a way to stand out in the B2B e-commerce market, Walsh says. "E-commerce works best when it's frictionless and enriched," he says.

