

# Using the Internet to Support Retailers

By BNET Editorial

published on BNET.com 10/03/2007

Using the Internet to support retailers saves time, and also provides higher quality information than telephone-based systems allow. Therefore, transferring routine processes to the Internet helps improve productivity and increase profits by allowing retailers more time to do what they do best: selling products.

## What You Need to Know

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### **How can I avoid security risks when I use the Internet to communicate?**

Securing Web pages helps minimize the threat of breached security. Consider only communicating commercially sensitive or confidential material through password-protected pages on your Web site.

### **What if retailers aren't computer literate?**

You might find that your retailers or their employees have varying degrees of technical literacy or comfort using computers. Some retailers may also have older, slower computers that can't handle high-speed, data-intensive communications. To get retailers up to speed, you may need to invest in infrastructure, training, or technical support.

### **It is expensive to set up a retailer communication network on the Internet. Will it be worth the cost?**

Though investing in Internet communication may be high, you will likely save money in time, administration, publishing, and distributing information in the long-term. The Internet offers competitive advantages that help improve profit margins and performance.

## What to Do

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### **Increase Retailer Efficiency**

Using the Internet for retailer communications saves time and often improves information quality. This helps retailers work more efficiently. You can use the Internet for communicating current product and market information, conducting routine administrative tasks, and processing orders.

### **Limit Telephone Contact**

In the past, most retailer business was handled via telephone. This resulted in a lot of back-and-forth communication to check stock and prices, place orders, verify shipment dates, and discuss credit issues, for example. Transferring such routine processes to the Internet reduces the time spent on phone calls, so retailers and their employees can focus on selling. It also allows retailers to access information whenever is convenient for them, not just during normal business hours.

### **Speed Up Information Delivery**

The Internet speeds up the transfer of information. It allows you to provide current stock and pricing information on your Web site, and it allows retailers a way to place and track orders quickly. It's also easy to publish short-term special offers and tactical promotions on your Web site.

### **Secure Your Web Site**

You can secure your Web site to keep confidential some types of information. For instance, your public Web site might display product details and pictures, along with the manufacturer's recommended retail price. Retailers would receive a username and password, so that they can view additional, secure information and access discounted prices. Yet another level of security, for instance a password linked with their account number, would allow them to view details about their own orders and shipments.

## **Automate Processes**

It has become much easier to automate some Internet updates in recent years. Automating processes where you can will result in substantial time savings.

## **Speed up Invoicing**

Implementing online shipment notification can provide many benefits. It allows the company and the retailer to see when shipments are made without any time lag in communicating information back and forth. This allows retailers to invoice and receive payment from their customers more quickly.

## **Improve Distribution**

Retailer warehouse managers benefit from online shipment information. The fact that large retailers have thousands of products coming from different sources every day and often use their own numbering system can make product identification difficult. Internet product information and pictures can make it easier for warehouse managers to identify orders and input them into their own systems. Advance notice of shipments allows them to prepare paperwork before delivery, speeding up the receipt process.

## **Extend Internet Applications**

The Internet is useful for more than communicating about orders and shipments. It can also help in such areas as marketing and training. For instance, a Web site can offer templates, corporate-identity information, and other marketing material to assist retailers with their advertising program. You can also provide trainings online to increase retailer skills and product knowledge.

## **Increase Competitive Advantage**

Using the Internet for retailer communications will allow both manufacturers and retailers to work more efficiently and provide quality customer service throughout the year. This gives you a competitive advantage over other companies that don't use the Internet for retailer support.

## What to Avoid

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### **You Add Too Much Too Quickly**

If you are just beginning to use the Internet for retailer communications, remember there are likely to be varying degrees of technical aptitude within your retailer network. To avoid problems, consider transferring information delivery to the Internet in phases. Ensure one service is working well before proceeding with other services.

### **You Fail to Update Information**

It is important to ensure your Web site stays up-to-date with current product information and prices. If possible, automate some processes to simplify the updating process.

### **You Don't Install Proper Security Measures**

Retailers may be discouraged from using a site if they feel it is not secure. It is critical that you secure your Web site with password-protected pages, so that individual retailer information remains confidential.

### **You Fail to Provide Support**

Providing quick and thorough help-desk support is important when retailers have questions or problems. Failing to provide support will only cause frustration.

## Where to Learn More

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### **Web Site:**

New Architect: [www.webtechniques.com](http://www.webtechniques.com)