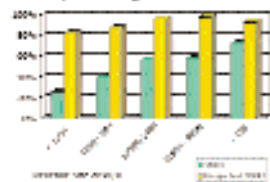


Distributors/Customers Agree Self-Service Applications a Hit

The search for ways to increase sales and decrease costs is never-ending. With increasing challenges presented by customers and emerging competitors, Wholesaler-Distributors (W/D) are turning to web-based customer self-service applications. The promise of business web sites of years past is being fulfilled by web solutions offering improvements in sales, productivity and customer retention.

The 2004 National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors study, *Facing the Forces of Change*, reveals increased acceptance of the Internet as a business tool. Distributors expect 32% of orders will be received online by 2008. All distribution segments are seeing the results of Customer Self-Service and 24/7/365 access: improved customer satisfaction, reduced customer service calls, higher average order size and differentiation in obtaining new business.

% Of W/D Offering Web-Based Ordering



Early adopters have learned lessons. The benefits of real-time integration to enterprise data have exceeded those originally anticipated by implementors of business-to-business electronic storefronts.

Customer retention is higher for segments using a web site. With integration to real-time data including contract pricing, some W/D see longer contract periods

and a direct reduction in the bid negotiation process.

Access to customer-specific pricing and product availability has been a big hit even in cases where customers have been slow to utilize the online ordering



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option. Once customers see the value of self-service functions, many request **access to more data** such as A/R detail and purchasing history. Shared enterprise data provides a competitive advantage in luring and retaining customers.

The early web order entry tool has greatly expanded. **A personalized, efficient experience** is highly valued...and frequently used. This means recognizing that not all guests on the self-service site will want the same workflow and options. Configurable features, favorites lists, multiple search options and timely transaction confirmations all contribute to the acceptance of the self-service option.

New challenges bring new opportunities. While some trends are still emerging, there seems to be no doubt that Customer Self-Service presents a real opportunity for Wholesaler-Distributors.