Supplier Portals:
Insight into an Efficient Supply Chain

Plex Online
White Paper

At a Glance

- This paper describes the benefits that suppliers and manufacturers derive from implementing supplier portals— an adjunct to Plex Online that is often an afterthought but which soon becomes an invaluable aid for efficient operations.

- Explains how Plex Online's supplier portals enable non-EDI capable suppliers to efficiently communicate with and manage deliveries with the enterprise.

- Describes how supplier portals provide the enterprise with a transparent overview of the status of the supply chain and support strategic delivery of necessary components and ingredients in a timely fashion.

- Provides a real-world explanation of benefits from solar panel manufacturer UNI-SOLAR.

Supplier portals add increased efficiency, quality, and transparency to the supply chain

Manufacturers previously tracked suppliers and their deliveries of goods in a predictable method that often resulted in errors. Using the postal service to mail P.O.s, tracking deliveries via spreadsheet, creating labels in an ad hoc fashion, manually inputting data on various forms, inventorying more product than needed to ensure no interruption in production— these approaches often led to wasteful, expensive operations.

Manufacturers addressed this challenge by mandating suppliers adhere to the strict regimen of electronic data interchange— EDI. EDI is efficient, but is also time consuming to achieve and expensive to implement.

For small to midsized suppliers eager to adopt more efficient communications with customers but lacking access to an established EDI–compliant system, supplier portals are an attractive, alternative cost–saving solution. Supplier portals also give the supplier insight into the customers' demand and specifications, quality issues, and forecast information for help in the planning process.
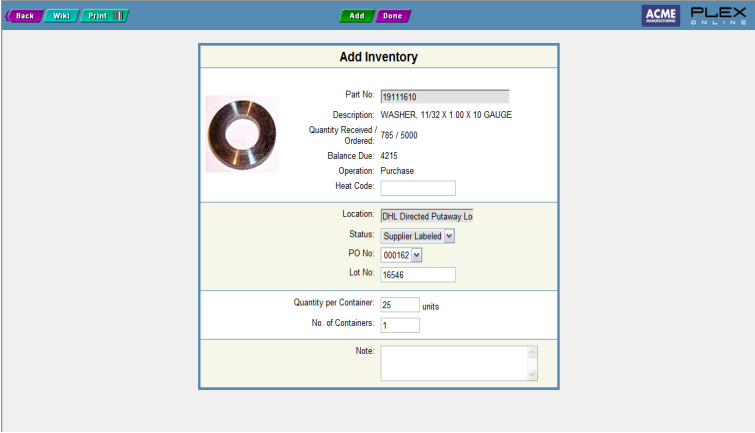
Suppliers leverage portals in a variety of ways

Suppliers typically find immediate value in several portal functions:

- Supplier scorecards provide easy access to an automatically generated graphic that shows performance in a number of key areas.

			Score Comparison						⊡ ✕
Supplier: **Alkar Steel**		DUNS No: **5858585**		Group:				Show Support Data: ☐	
View Results: By Month ▾		From Month: Sep 2010 ▾		To Month: Nov 2010 ▾				Show Suppliers: ☑	
Supplier Type:		Active Only: ☐						Show Max Score: ☐	
								Search	

Metric Group	Metric	Supplier	2010 Sep	2010 Oct	2010 Nov	Avg
Quality	Parts per Million - Shipped	Alkar Steel	20	20	20	20
	VA-VE Submissions	Alkar Steel	0	0	8	3
	Problem Reports	Alkar Steel	50	50	50	50
		Quality Subtotal/Average	**70**	**70**	**78**	**73**
Delivery	On Time Delivery %	Alkar Steel	30	30	0	20
		Delivery Subtotal/Average	**30**	**30**	**0**	**20**
Technology	Technology Effectiveness	Alkar Steel	6	9	9	8
		Technology Subtotal/Average	**6**	**9**	**9**	**8**
Cost	Cost Competitiveness	Alkar Steel	6	10	9	8
		Cost Subtotal/Average	**6**	**10**	**9**	**8**
		Total Score Average	**112**	**119**	**96**	**109**

- Real-time customer releases, defined label printing formats, and less paperwork combine to enable speedier processes and more efficient receiving of material.

- Corrective action forms – Plex Online supports all major root cause/corrective action forms, which can be integrated into the scorecard and allow the supplier and customer to collaborate on the corrective action.

- Portals enable suppliers to submit quotes online in an easily populated template with detailed pricing info broken down to whatever level is required. An added benefit is that all quote responses are saved in the same location and easily accessible— allowing the customer to easily compare the quote responses from different suppliers.

The scorecard is customized by the customer and driven by attributes within Plex Online. Outside data can also be entered. Using the scorecard, suppliers can review on a regular basis and compare results of key metrics. The problem control module allows suppliers to access problem record data— and if a slippage in a key area is identified, the root cause can be identified and a corrective action applied. All of this activity can be conducted with confidence as the customer can— if he chooses— establish security safeguards that ensure that only a specified supplier will have access to the data.

"The typical Plex Online customer adds supplier portal functionality as a pilot with a few suppliers. They soon are expanding to more suppliers as both the supplier and customer appreciate the ease with which it can be implemented and the advantages it brings."

How one manufacturer leveraged supplier portals to improve efficiency and eliminate waste

UNI–SOLAR is the world's largest producer of flexible solar panels. More than 35 suppliers provide rolled polymers, steel, gasses, a range of lightweight metals, and other materials to create the sophisticated solar panels.

It quickly became evident that using manual methods to order materials, set delivery schedules, and communicate with vendors was rapidly becoming inefficient and time–consuming.

UNI–SOLAR decided to implement Plex Online's supplier portal with the goal of providing real–time communications between UNI–SOLAR and its suppliers with 24/7 visibility and connectivity as part of an on–demand service, along with real–time pull signals.

New processes for UNI-SOLAR and its suppliers create a transparency previously unavailable

Now, the manufacturer enters, tracks, monitors, and fulfills orders via the Internet. The system stores key data for each order, including due date and quantities. Because this capability is integrated with job tracking and inventory, users from across the enterprise monitor the detailed, real–time status of any order.

UNI–SOLAR and its suppliers store, edit, track, and view documents online. Plex Online includes full electronic approval and revision tracking capabilities enabling the entire supplier network to meet requirements.

UNI–SOLAR now saves time and improves supplier management through a real–time, Internet–based supplier portal. The company improved accuracy of shipments and gained visibility into inbound materials that was not possible in past years.

"Our ability to forecast materials purchasing has improved, and we now stagger deliveries to optimize production levels," stated UNI–SOLAR's Data Integrity Manager Bob Lewis. "Our production planners rely on a real–time dashboard that indicates raw material levels and see in real time any potential issues for production disruptions. This simply wasn't possible in the past."

> "Supplier portals are a jewel in the rough for manufacturers, suppliers and their customers."

Supplier portals are an often overlooked benefit of Plex Online

Manufacturers typically don't deploy ERP systems like Plex Online in order to provide suppliers access to portals, even though they provide a myriad of benefits for the supplier and customer. However, when manufacturers consider the benefits of deploying this functionality of Plex Online, it's often the proverbial no–brainer for both supplier and customer.

Supplier portals ensure better, more transparent communication with the customer, reduce paperwork for releases, speed the supply process, and automatically provide a supplier with metrics to evaluate how well they are performing and what areas can be improved.

Supplier portals provide a win–win scenario for suppliers and their customers without the expense or time–consuming overhead of managing an electronic data interchange.

About Plex Online

Plex Online, built on a "Software as a Service" (SaaS) model, offers more than 350 functional modules, providing manufacturers instant access to vital information and management functions using a simple Web browser. The on-demand solution features product lifecycle management (PLM) functions such as program and change management, enterprise resource planning (ERP) functions such as accounting and finance modules, customer relationship management (CRM) features such as order entry and tracking, manufacturing execution systems (MES) functions such as production scheduling and machine integration and supply chain management (SCM) functions such as supplier quality and traceability.

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