

Manufacturers 2002 Spotlight

TWO-THOUSAND TWO

Compliments of Supply House Times, July 2002

Merit Brass Connects To The Pipeline Of The Future

Technology continues to evolve with better and faster ways of communicating to the world. The first attempt to solidify business relationships and create an ease of doing business began with Electronic Data Interchange in the late 1970s, early 1980s. EDI enabled companies to utilize standardized transaction sets for specific documents such as invoices, purchase orders, bills of lading, etc. These transaction sets allowed the users to perform business functions electronically and reduce the opportunity for human error. It also enabled trading partners to eliminate certain redundancies and time-consuming procedures. The second and most recent attempt to improve business relationships technologically has occurred through the "World Wide Web" otherwise known as the Internet. The Internet originated in the 1970s through a government project established to create a system that would link several governmental networks together. This form of technology has seen tremendous growth since the turn of the millennium. The "dot com" era has enabled businesses worldwide, regardless of size, to reach a broader target market, service customers 24 hours 7 days a week, and reduce transaction costs through e-commerce (electronic commerce) capabilities.

As part of Merit's commitment to its customers to continuously improve, Merit



offered EDI to its customers in 1995. In 2001, Merit expanded its EDI capabilities to include invoices and full integration into its ERP system. This improvement sparked activity that resulted in the employment of a full-time EDI coordinator to service all of its customers' needs related to this technology. The acceptance of transacting business with Merit via EDI took approximately 6 years. Kimberly Wallingford, Merit's Marketing Coordinator, feels that "this slow progression towards EDI was due to the affordability of EDI by our customers as well as the support required to manage it." Wallingford is concerned that the acceptance of Merit's distributor base to doing business over the Internet will mirror that of EDI.

In 1998 Merit implemented an informational website, www.meritbrass.com.

This year, Merit has revamped its entire website with a new look, more information and more services such as MTR Retrieval, order expediting, on-line order entry, on-line assistance and enhanced downloading capabilities. Merit encourages its customers to visit its site. "We don't foresee a large transition from fax or EDI orders to e-commerce orders in the short-term, but two great features of our new site enables customers to download our catalog and expedite their orders," says Inside Sales Manager, Joyce Sarich. "I know this will save our customers

and my team members a great deal of time – and in this business, gaining information like that quicker and easier is a huge plus for everyone."

Merit's management expects the PVF industry to continue to be strongly based on relationships, relying on face-to-face business dealings. They realize that technology can only support Merit's distributors so far and that interaction remains key in an industry where competition is fierce. Merit's website is another way of providing competitive service advantages to its customers. "We've focused on staying a step or two ahead of our competitors for the last 65 years," says Alan Lipp, Executive Vice President. "Providing superior service to our customers has always been at the core of our strategy."

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