

Top 10 Reasons to Order Online

Industrial automation vendors are responding to end user and equipment builder demands for expanded and improved online ordering options.

By Sean Beeker, Endress+Hauser

Online shopping has grown to about 12 percent of total retail sales over the past few decades, with strong growth predicted for decades to come ([according to statista.com](https://www.statista.com)). In the industrial marketplace, a similar revolution is taking place as end users demand the same advantages they enjoy for consumer transactions. These advantages vary from person to person, with some differences between the consumer and industrial sectors.

This article discusses the top ten reasons most often cited for ordering online (Table 1), and it also presents specific examples of how industrial end-user purchasers are benefiting from online ordering.

Placing Power in the Hands of the Purchaser

End user purchasers can go online at any time to see pricing details and place orders. Purchasing online eliminates time consuming, back-and-forth email communications—benefiting end users, sales personnel, and vendors.

Online Information Improves Ordering

Mistakes are also reduced because part numbers, quantities, delivery addresses, and other pertinent information can be selected or entered online by the end user. Most web browsers provide autofill for company-specific information, speeding and simplifying data entry. Some industrial automation vendors now offer online storage of account information from prior purchases to further simplify ordering.

More extensive lookup and search capabilities are also possible. For example, Endress+Hauser's online tools provide search capability where an end user simply enters an instrument serial number to identify associated spare parts, documentation, device drivers, and other information. The site has more than 15 years of data history for more than

Top 10 Reasons for Shopping Online

1. 24/7/365 access
2. Price comparison
3. Saves time
4. Reduces mistakes
5. Can store information online from previous orders
6. Availability of specification tools
7. Able to dive into technical details
8. Separates specifier from purchaser
9. Easier to track orders
10. Faster resolution of issues

Table 1

40 million devices, making it easy to purchase an additional instrument of the same type or its newer equivalent, or any spare parts. End users can be confident they are getting the right product quickly. An online video walks users through the process and explains additional features.

Simplify Specification and Purchasing

Most manufacturers employ technical specialists who are very familiar with their company's production processes. This depth of knowledge is required to specify most of the products needed by a manufacturer, such as process instrumentation. Even with this expertise, some end users may find it difficult to find the exact right part to fit their needs.

To address this issue, many vendors offer online specification tools and extensive online technical information. For example, [Endress.com](https://www.endress.com) provides tools for end users to select and size the right product to fit their

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Description

Membrane filtration is one of the key technologies for water treatment. It is widely used in applications such as potable water production, water re-use, industrial process water treatment and - of course - desalination. Wastewater treatment plants also use membranes. The basic idea is to force water (and dissolved substances which are able to cross the membrane pores) under pressure through the filter membrane, whereby the main flow is across the membrane (cross-flow filtration). The filtrate on the other side of the membrane is rinsed away and collected in the filtrate pipe.

There are four main sub-segments: microfiltration (MF), nanofiltration (NF), ultrafiltration (UF) and reverse osmosis (RO).

Figure 1: Online selection tools help end users specify instruments based on process, measurement, connection, and other criteria.

industry-specific applications. End users simply enter the application parameters – such as flow, pressure, level, temperature – and receive recommendations for the applicable products. These products can then be compared, specified, and configured. For most products, 2D drawings and 3D models are available in common CAD data formats for import directly into design drawings.

An online video is available to guide end users through the required product specification steps (Figure 1).

Once specified, the products need to be procured, which for many firms is a task reserved for the purchasing department because they control the commercial authority, know the preferred means of payment, and have the knowledge to classify each purchase correctly for accounting and tax purposes.

Online ordering portals can also offer ready access to online chat sessions or support phone calls when users need an extra level of assistance. These portals can provide a direct connection to local representatives through request for quotes, and through easy access to their account manager so they can quickly call or send him or her a message.

Online ordering facilitates the separation of the specifier from the purchaser by providing access to online quotes, as well as customized product lists where the specifier can store products. Once this is done, the specifier can notify the

purchaser, who can access the quote or product list to place the order.

After the Order

When goods are ordered via phone or in person, order status must typically be checked by contacting the person who took the order, or someone else at the vendor.

By contrast, with online ordering status can be obtained quickly via a PC or smartphone. For example, Endress.com delivers a seamless experience where users can get detailed status and shipment tracking for any orders, whether they were placed online or offline through their sales rep.

Interstates Improves Ordering

Interstates, an automation and electrical service provider and construction company, was looking for an efficient way to streamline its specification and purchasing process because manually entering and tracking orders had become inefficient and time consuming for the company and its customers.

Numerous challenges were introduced due to steps required in each stage of the manual process. Multiple information sources and personnel were involved, creating a visibility barrier among those working on a project. A project's internal and external communication via email and phone prompted delays in response time, increased labor cost, caused inefficient time usage, and resulted in greater chances for error. Interstates knew they needed an efficient solution to



Figure 2. Endress.com expedited and improved all facets of the procurement process for Interstates.

simplify the ordering process and improve the procurement part of their business. They also wanted a solution that could increase visibility while providing real-time data and metrics.

Endress+Hauser representatives spoke with Interstates personnel about their Endress.com (Figure 2) and the digital tools available on the platform. The online shop centralizes the resources needed to streamline the specification and purchasing process. The platform gives end users access to a complete set of tools and resources for Endress+Hauser’s entire product range. This includes 24/7/365 access to drawings, documents, pricing, lead times, order history, quotes, and more. Interstates can configure products to include the options and features that best meet their application needs.

“When putting together proposals and prices, the online shop lets me flip around proposals very quickly, with confidence in the price and lead time,” says Dave Van Schouwen, designer, Interstates. “The online shop platform has increased visibility for those working on a project and improved turnaround times for quotes. Our entire project team can simultaneously work on the same project and acquire real-time data and metrics. If mistakes are made, we can quickly identify and fix them,” adds Van Schouwen.

Conclusion

Online ordering is growing fast in the consumer sector, and forward-looking industrial vendors are taking notice and providing end users with similar, and sometimes additional, advantages. Many of the products typically ordered by end users and equipment builders are more complex than those purchased by consumers, necessitating more sophisticated online ordering systems, along with easy access to a sales rep when further technical assistance is needed. End users and equipment builders should examine the systems provided by each vendor closely to make sure the tools they need are in place to maximize productivity by improving the procurement process.

About the Author



Sean Beeker is the Senior Marketing Program Manager at Endress+Hauser USA in Greenwood, IN, and he has been with the company since 2012. In his current role he leads a digital marketing team and is responsible for digital business, campaign management, lead management, and advertising. Sean holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Business Administration and Marketing from the University of Illinois.

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WP01133Z/24/EN/01.20