

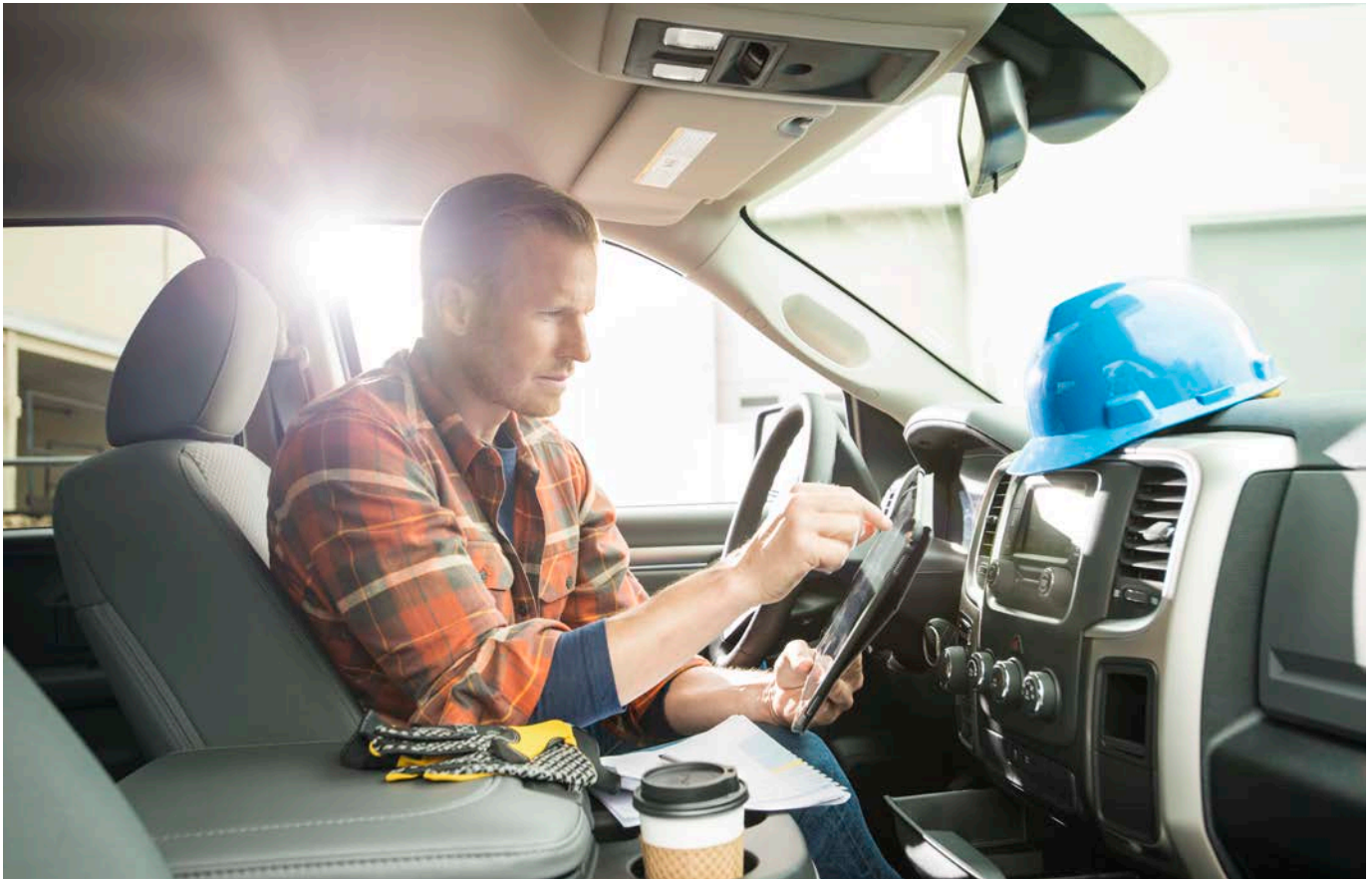


Be Prepared

AD eCOMMERCE SOLUTIONS

In this era of the digital customer, eCommerce is the fastest-growing sales channel in today's professional market. In fact, according to Forrester Research, 30% of today's B2B buyers complete more than half of their work purchases online. And that number is projected to grow to 56% by 2017. Undoubtedly, today's independents are getting serious about investing in eCommerce capabilities.

"It's not going away. It is a reality," said **Jack Templin**, President of AD Industrial. "Just because your customer is not buying this way today doesn't mean they won't expect to buy this way tomorrow. Members and their customers want this transition to occur quickly, and the journey to eCommerce is not a short one. We have to start somewhere to get to the ultimate destination to transact online, and our strategy is to help members use eCommerce as a relevant part of their business in a profitable fashion. Being able to transact online, at least in the Industrial Division, is NOT optional."



Ed Crawford, President of AD Electrical, US & Latin America, added "There has been a generational shift in the industry. Things that are new to the older generation are things taken for granted by the new generation of company leaders and customers. Today's purchaser is much more knowledgeable before even the first conversation with a distributor or supplier. With the speed of information, end-users have more data to make purchase decisions. Business is looked at differently today by many of our members and suppliers who recognize that there is a fundamental shift in the way their customers make decisions on purchases. If we don't supply them with proper

information our competitors will, and the decision will be made without our information, causing us to lose control of the sale."

Templin sees the need for eCommerce Solutions as the industry has changed. "Reality has set in," he said. "Members have seen that this internet thing is gonna catch on, so people who were thinking they were not going to have to sell over the internet or those who thought that their customers don't and won't buy that way have reached the realization that customers DO expect to transact business that way. In a B2C environment, it forces the hands of suppliers and distributors to respond

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"It's not going away. It is a reality ... Members and their customers want this transition to occur quickly, and the journey to eCommerce is not a short one."

– **Jack Templin**, AD



Jack Templin

President,
Industrial Supply Division

AD



Ed Crawford

President, U.S. Electrical Division
& International Development

AD



Caroline Ernst

Vice President,
eCommerce Solutions

AD

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in another competition, as demographic changes in industry move to a generation that grew up on the internet. These new decision-makers are already into positions of influence as buyers expect to buy anything and everything online.”

THE OFFER

Digital tools are integral to today’s elevated customer experience delivery, and this innovation is a natural evolution for AD. “Throughout AD’s history, we have brought companies together to collaborate and solve problems that were difficult for them to handle on their own,” said AD Chairman and CEO **Bill Weisberg**. “We have enabled really strong local businesses to flourish through sharing best practices with each other and through collaborating on initiatives, and this really isn’t any different. The AD eCommerce program

is a wonderful vehicle for independents to collaborate together and overcome the competitive advantage that national chains have when it comes to their size and their ability to invest in technology.”

“The mission of AD eCommerce solutions is to leverage the AD scale and community, enable

are going to be fighting on with national chains as well as international companies, and they’re fighting for their own customers. Instead of fighting on the factory floor or at the construction site, they’re fighting on the Internet and through mobile devices. AD eCommerce Solutions enables them to share the

“Throughout AD’s history, we have brought companies together to collaborate and solve problems that were difficult for them to handle on their own ... The AD eCommerce program is a wonderful vehicle for independents to collaborate...”

– **Bill Weisberg**, AD

members to achieve their eCommerce goals and win in an evolving digital world,” according to **Caroline Ernst**, AD Vice President, eCommerce Solutions.

Weisberg added, “When we look at eCommerce, we look at a battlefield that independents

cost of being able to compete successfully on this digital platform. On their own, an independent distributor would have to spend a fortune to be able to do what we as a community of independents can do together.”

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DRIVEN TO SUCCEED



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“WebStore Services allow our members to quickly launch on an eCommerce platform and integrate with a variety of enterprise applications ...”

– Caroline Ernst, AD

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Ernst outlined the services at hand. “eContent Services enable a multi-divisional, million SKU database that is filled with enhanced product data. It is normalized and put in a member-driven taxonomy,” Ernst said. “eContent Services also offer members a customer-service representative portal that has a master catalog of all products available to members.”

“The AD WebStore offering is one in conjunction with AD’s partner, Unilog. WebStore Services allow our members to quickly launch on an eCommerce platform and integrate with a variety of enterprise applications, such as full account management capabilities, promotions, and they are mobile-responsive for contractors on the go.”

Ersnt added, “Finally, with the AD Consultative Services offering,

AD works directly with members on their eBusiness strategy. “We will consult with you on your web integration, your ERP integration, your launch and eventually your acquisition and retention marketing strategies.”

There are three main differences with the AD program, compared to other offers out there. First, the program is completely **member driven**, secondly the scale of AD makes the program **extremely affordable**, and third, the **quality** of SKUs are unparalleled.

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OUR Partners

AD eCommerce Solutions currently works with two key partners, Wayne, PA-based Unilog and Ashburn, VA-based B2X Partners, and each has been essential to the launch of AD's eCommerce Solutions, according to Templin. "Bob Lewis, President of B2X, has been a vital cog from the beginning of the journey, by helping refine strategy," Templin said. "He shared his experience and allowed us to follow him on the fast track with expertise. If we had gone on this journey alone, using the expertise of our members, we could have gotten there. However, with his help and experience we got there quickly.



Bob Lewis

President

B2X Partners

Another partner, Unilog and Suchit Bachalli, President – North America, shared content services and storefront options with our members. They were very responsive to the changes we wanted to make, and very conscientious to responding to our members. Both providers have been excellent partners."

Unilog has been very fortunate to have had a ringside view into some of the largest digital transformations in B2B, according to **Suchit Bachalli**. "Specifically in the past five years we find that the conversation around B2B Digital Strategy has matured significantly,"



Suchit Bachalli

President – North America

Unilog

he said. "I remember there was a time we would go into a business and had to do a lot of education. Today, customers are very savvy and articulate their goals and vision very well."

Lewis agreed that for members there is most definitely a digital focus. "More of the distributors we work with are beginning to understand that digital is a new channel, and the same level of planning and execution need to go into it, in order to succeed," he said.

Apex Industrial Automation LLC, Downers Grove, IL aligned with B2X Partners, which has worked to define the scope and assess the needs of the Bearing and Power Transmission industry.

"Bob Lewis provided our Board of Directors with some excellent insight on market dynamics and analysis currently offered by national chain competitors," said Apex President **Ryan Watts**.

Bachalli recognized AD's commitment to the solution,

which has been in the works for about two years now. “AD and its members will be investing close to \$25 million in this program over the next five years,” he said. “That is a tremendous commitment to their membership and a testament to their vision and ability to execute.”

This year, industrial equipment supplier N.H. Bragg, Bangor, ME contracted with Unilog for the company storefront, and the provider also handles marketing services for support on the look and feel of the new company website, which should go live this fall.

“We have a very good working relationship with Unilog,” said N.H. Bragg President **Jon Eames**. “The biggest thing is leveraging the scale of the organization. There is no way individually we could get the content we need, in the form we need, for the investment we are making. In addition, we also invested in Unilog’s CIMM2 web engine, giving us a very robust storefront similar to some of the very large distributors, but at a price we can afford.”

Bachalli said Unilog has adapted to the changing landscape to help guide AD members. “We view ourselves as being a true partner to B2B eCommerce in general and wholesale

better technology, better content and better processes. Unilog brings all of these to bear in order for our clients to be successful. This is best visible in the fact that three of

“More of the distributors we work with are beginning to understand that digital is a new channel, and the same level of planning and execution need to go into it, in order to succeed.”

– **Bob Lewis**, B2X Partners

distribution industry in specific,” he said. “We believe that our customers are currently tasked with ‘catching up’ to the larger industry leaders in digital. In order to catch up you need

our customers SupplyFORCE, Van Meter and Werner Electric made it to the Internet Retailer Top 300 sites within a year of being on CIMM2—AD’s chosen Digital Commerce Platform.”



Ryan Watts

President

Apex Industrial Automation LLC



Jon Eames

President

N.H. Bragg



Greg Chun

VP of Marketing

McNaughton-McKay

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MEMBER DRIVEN & QUALITY CONTENT

AD's eContent initiative Steering Committee in each Division are composed of members of the AD distribution community.

Greg Chun, VP of Marketing, McNaughton McKay, Madison Heights, MI explained, "You have about 10 people on the Steering Committee that are AD Members, representing all different sizes of companies and all different industries and customer bases. This ensures that AD, as well as their partners that are helping to create this solution, have the right strategic direction and the right priorities in mind, as they move forward on this," he said.

In terms of governance, Chun cited the online community as a way for all of members to have access to the status of the information as it is being created. "Already we've

had a series of cases that we've had the opportunity to evaluate related to, for instance, the taxonomy and the different levels inside the taxonomy. Members from the steering committee as well as from the AD member community in general can go in there, and have gone in there, to evaluate certain aspects of this, made suggestions that have now been incorporated into the overall taxonomy."

One major concern is to make sure that quality reigns. Do all the images match the item description? What will often happen is that one manufacturer codes a product as Black, while another manufacturer codes the color as Dark or Midnight. AD's eCommerce Solution takes careful steps to ensure that all SKUs use the same nomenclature, and that each product is coded the same from manufacturer to manufacturer.

Chun shares, "No matter how good your technology platform is, the software, the user interface, no matter how good that is, if you have poor quality data, then that system will fail. Customers have come to the point where they have expectations related to what they see online, mostly from their personal experience, but that definitely translates into their expectations when they're at work."

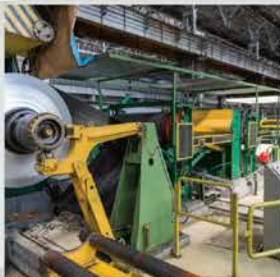
"AD has created an online community that allows us to input information to be part of the process as it goes through, and to have comments, have suggestions, and to evaluate from start to finish. It has afforded us the ability to continue to look at the content and make sure that it's what we need it to be," added Chun. "One of the beauties of being member-led and being part of AD is that no one member can look at all of this data, have the time to look at all of this data, and evaluate its content to make sure that it's doing the right things. No content provider can do that either."

It's all about a team approach, according to **Jake Fegely**, COO of Plymouth Meeting, PA-based Cooney Brothers. "Third-party providers may be very good at developing and structuring content, but product experts are still vitally important to reviewing the work and making sure that it is done right," he said. "The AD process is structured to bring product expertise into the product content development from the very beginning and throughout the life of the content."

The improvements in process, efficiency and accuracy will be significant,

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according to **Jeff Poss**, Parts & eCommerce Sales Manager for Habegger, Cincinnati, OH. “SKU data and attributes are in varied spreadsheets that their eCommerce Coordinator manages manually. This process is obviously time consuming and prone to human errors,” he said. “As part of this AD initiative, we will be able free up our eCommerce Coordinator’s time and continue to drive up our Line Item Per Invoice (LIPI)—we put a heavy emphasis on LIPI and track it regularly—and profitability. We are excited to have all of our SKU data standardized and stored in one convenient location.”

Chun summarized, “The key to quality content is that it needs to be complete, it needs to be consistent, and it needs to be normalized. Without those factors the user experience will suffer completely.”

SCALE & COSTS

Scale is true differentiator of AD eCommerce Solutions for Habegger. Poss said it’s the scalability of resources, which is something he hasn’t seen from any other solution provider. “If you simply need normalized data and operate your own eCommerce solution, you can do that. If you don’t have any kind of eCommerce platform now and need help starting one up, you can do that.

Between AD and Unilog there are a great array of resources available to implement, improve and support our eCommerce initiatives.”

Certainly, key advantages of the AD eCommerce solution are cost-containment and peer-to-peer help, noted Weisberg. “We’re making it significantly less expensive, I mean hugely less expensive, and I think if you’re on your own you’re going to have a hard time competing effectively in this type of battle-field. But if you’re part of our organization, if you’re part of our group and you’re participating on this program you’re going to be extraordinarily successful.”

“The biggest difference is a shared approach to a very costly challenge,” Templin agreed. “Others that may attempt to go with this alone have to try to

figure out how to acquire and maintain the SKUs and get supplier cooperation on new products, images and data. Many companies try to do it alone, so AD can do it better for them by leveraging our scale across divisions. The biggest advantage is that together, we win, for ultimately hundreds of members across the divisions.”

Watts reinforces the uniqueness of the program. “AD eCommerce Services cover multiple industries which provides for enough critical mass to deliver effective results. I am not aware of any other buying group, certainly not within the Bearing and Power Transmission industry that can effectively offer what Affiliated Distributors has developed and implemented.”

“The high quality of service and the extremely affordable rates

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Jake Fegely
COO

Cooney Brothers



Jeff Poss
Parts & eCommerce Sales
Manager

Habegger

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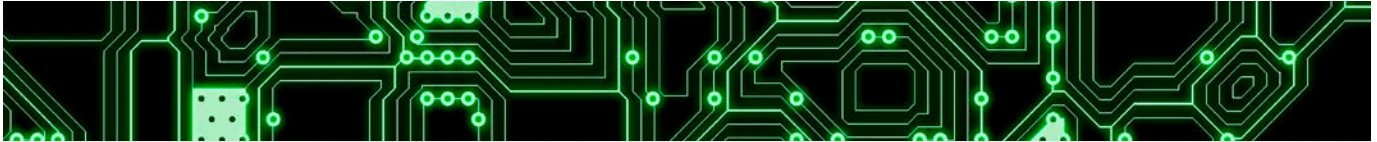


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AD ELECTRICAL & IDEA

“Electrical manufacturers and distributors ask ‘Why is AD doing this?’” Chun continued. “They say, ‘I thought the IDW (industry data warehouse) was the solution for the industry, I thought the industry data warehouse was not only compliant but excellent with their two measurements that they have.’”

Chun noted that IDW is, indeed, a critical part of the content solution for the industry. “It is supported by the manufacturers, it is helped to be developed by the manufacturers, and it’s updated and maintained on a real-time basis,” he said. “Without that, an industry data standard isn’t going to be as up to date as it needs to be, or as complete as it needs to be with the right products. Because it’s in real time, the IDW has information in there that includes new products. It includes obsoleted products; it includes super seeded products, and all of that timely information is available through the IDW with notifications to allow us to update our systems as a distributor.”

However, Chun said that as good as the IDW is, it’s not quite good enough. “Hundreds of manufacturers are submitting data into a data warehouse using a process that has inherent problems in it” he said. “It creates incomplete data, inconsistent data, and the way different manufacturers are categorizing products are all different as well. Any one of those problems introduced into your data will make a negative experience for your customer as they’re navigating through your website. Add all three of those problems into the data and you will drive your customers away. Consider the IDW as the aggregator of raw data. By definition, raw means untreated, unedited, unfinished. The AD solution,

by its design, in a simple word, is intended to finish the data from the raw form that IDW puts it in.”

The problem, Chun added, is it’s not possible to get hundreds of manufacturers to submit data the same way, so it will always be in a “raw” form and not immediately usable for optimal customer experience. “Someone has to take that raw data, with all of its inconsistencies and potential incompleteness, and finish it,” he said. “One manufacturer might use the term volt. The other manufacturer might use the term voltage. Those two things need to be the same from a customer’s standpoint. They are the same from a customer’s standpoint. Inside of the database, they need to be the same as well. Someone needs to do those examples, and that is an example. Someone needs to go through and do that, and that’s really the premise of the AD solution.”

According to Crawford, AD has addressed growing online business with two initiative items: “The eCommerce data and the storefront service.” He said, “For the Electrical Division, our members had a head start. AD partner IDEA has done a good job using attributed data that can be used today, and many of our division members have been using attributed data—though not in the mass numbers we have available—but many are used to using data. We had a head start in Electrical as IDW has been around for a while and we have normalized data they need. We made it consistent and ready to use for the eCommerce platform and store front offering with Unilog, Our associations with IDW and Unilog, as well as member acceptance and familiarity with the system allowed the Electrical Division to hit the ground running and accelerate the program.”

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are incomparable to the other solutions that are out there,” said **Eric Finkelstein**, Pricing Analyst/WEB Commerce Manager for Piscataway, NJ-based Aaron & Company Inc., who has worked with both Unilog and AD. “Subscribing to this service will help us compete online with the biggest companies in the nation without breaking the bank. Before AD started this amazing initiative, I conceded that our online presence would remain second-rate for years to come.”

“AD’s eCommerce Solution is a far more comprehensive program at an extremely affordable rate,” Finkelstein added. “AD has industry professionals working hand-in-hand with computer experts to put together a top of the line eCommerce platform, supported by accurate enriched data.”

GETTING STARTED

While technology conversion may be a challenge to the comfort zone of members, it’s the state of today’s marketplace. “One of the things that I’d want folks to know is that it’s okay if you’re not



Eric Finkelstein

Pricing Analyst/WEB
Commerce Manager

Aaron & Company Inc.

ready today to fully engage in every aspect of eCommerce,” Weisberg said. “That’s not a good reason to be on the sidelines. People should

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eADVICE

From AD's Top Strategy Partner

Members starting or strategizing their eCommerce journey could use some good advice. Bob Lewis, President, B2X Partners, offers three e-tips.

1

Your customers are buying online today from someone. And if it's not from you, there are sales that you are not winning. Distributors should differentiate from the nationals with service levels, local relationships, product knowledge and great support, but in the end people buy stuff from distributors, and increasingly online is how they want to do it. The shift to online is not coming, it's here, and you are already playing catch up if you're not in the game.

2

You wouldn't open a branch with nothing on the shelves; the same applies here. You can't launch your digital channel without product content. Don't neglect to consider how important content will be, and how costly it may be to obtain it. Nobody ever says they are going to Grainger's site because they are running the Hybris platform. In fact, most don't know and don't care; however, they do talk about how great the content is. I often say that online the data is the product.

3

You won't be Amazon out of the gate, but you don't need to be. It's all about gaining customer adoption in that existing base. Then once you have them engaged, capture more of their spend with you versus the competition, such as, increasing order frequency and average order value (AOV). In many cases they want to do more business with you, they are loyal to their best distributors, it's just that either you're not online today, or your current site is just not good (their loyalty ends when you start making work more difficult for them). Once you get past that point, and that takes time and effort, then you can start to focus on expanding the base, customer acquisition.

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AD eCommerce Solutions

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be participating in the program because they know that this is coming in the future and they know that they need to get started somewhere, somehow. There's not a single distributor that started with a 500,000 square-foot warehouse—they started small. Some with just trucks and then, they eventually got space for their goods. It's not any different; you've got to start somewhere. Our program can get you started where you're at, with the costs that you're willing to spend in order for you to get where you need to be in the future."

Crawford agreed. "You can't let uncertainty or fear of the unknown stop you from starting. You can't be concerned about learning something new; you have to begin the journey get comfortable and learn what works and what doesn't before you are put in a tough spot. Great marketers always learn and refine. Don't wait ... you will waste years of learning; to be successful you must jump on, jump in and invest in it. Part of the process is learning what works and what doesn't in the early years. We all know tomorrow business will be different, so you just build competencies today and become the expert when you need to be."

Eames advised members to get started. "If you are on the fence ... I'd say it's time to jump off the fence and get on board," he said. "I truly feel that eCommerce isn't an option anymore for the independent industrial distributor. We all have as independents, good customer relationships. We all have value added services that we think are pretty good, and they are. Unfortunately, now there are competitors in the market that are ahead of us in eCommerce, and our customers are expecting it, and we really need to get there. It's not something you can do overnight, it's a long process. It takes a lot of planning. You're not going to look like Grainger tomorrow. You need to get started and now's a good time. The AD program is really the most cost effective way to get there." ■



eCOMMERCE

Lessons Learned from AD Members

From the front lines, here are three pointers from members with 20/20 hindsight:

Q: WHAT IS THE ONE THING YOU WISH YOU KNEW BEFORE YOU STARTED YOUR COMPANY'S ECOMMERCE JOURNEY?

Jeff Poss, Parts & eCommerce Sales Manager, Habegger: "We've stubbed our toes a lot, as we launched and rolled out our programs. We put a heavy emphasis on dealer training, which is important, but we needed to put as much effort into our internal training and development. When a customer can call in and talk to just about anyone in your branch that can answer and help them with the website—that makes a huge impact. I'd also recommend you get a good team together that can give you honest feedback from all angles (such as, counter, outside sales, warehouse, accounting, customers). It's important that you include the features your consumers need. Make sure you design your systems and process with the customers' priorities in mind way above your internal priorities. Your business is all about serving them and your platforms should reflect that."

Ryan Watts, President, Apex Industrial Automation: "We easily underestimated the staffing requirements to maintain an effective eCommerce strategy. As more and more people purchase consumer goods online, their expectations for more product information has expanded for the products we market and sell online."

Jake Fegely, COO, Cooney Brothers: "This has been much more of a journey, where we are learning an entirely new approach to business. When we first started evaluating storefront software, every question we asked was answered "yes" by all the providers—we didn't know enough to ask differentiating questions. As we have educated ourselves over the past few years, we are asking better questions, but we are still learning and we know we have much more to learn."