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What is Claimed is:

1. 1.   A method for introducing a host-selected vendor to a customer through the
2. Internet for the purpose of selling a particular product or service and without
3. disrupting existing relationships between the customer and its vendors for the
4. product or service, comprising the steps of:
5.   (a)   obtaining at a host Web site a request received from the customer
6.   through an Internet connection;
7.   (b)   obtaining at the host Web site relationship-data which relates the
8.   request to one or more vendors selected by the customer;
9.   (c)   conveying the request obtained by the host Web site to the
10.   customer-selected vendors; and
11.   (d)   conveying the request to the host-approved vendor only upon a
12.   prescribed condition.

1. 2.   The method as in claim 1, including the additional step of reporting to the
2. customer any responses to the request through the Internet connection.

1. 3.   The method as in claim 1, wherein the host-approved vendor is one of the
2. host Web site and a third-party vendor.

1. 4.   The method as in claim 1, wherein the requests are requests for quotes and the
2. responses are quotes.

1. 5.   The method as in claim 1, including the additional steps of obtaining from the
2. customer (1) a product or service selection and (2) one or more vendor
3. selections for said product or service selection.

1. 6.   The method as in claim 1, wherein the conveying step comprises transmitting
2. the request to the customer-selected vendors by means selected from the
3. group of: EDI, e-mail, fax, telephone and the host Website.

1. 7.   The method as in claim 1, wherein the response is reported to the customer

2		through one of EDI, e-mail, fax, telephone and the host Web site.
1	8.	The method as in claim 1, wherein the relationship-data is maintained in a
2		data store connected to a server, and the server maintains the host Web site.
1	9.	The method as in claim 1, wherein the host Web site maintains a catalog of
2		information to satisfy the request.
1	10.	The method as in claim 1, wherein the step of conveying the request to a host-
2		approved vendor is performed automatically.
1	11.	The method as in claim 1, wherein the prescribed condition is that no single
2		one of the customer-selected vendors can fully satisfy the order.
1	12.	The method as in claim 11, wherein the step of conveying the request to a
2		host-approved vendor is performed automatically.
1	13.	The method as in claim 1, wherein the prescribed condition is that the
2		customer-selected vendors collectively cannot fully satisfy the order.
1	14.	The method as in claim 13, wherein the step of conveying the request to a
2		host-approved vendor is performed automatically.
1	15.	A method for facilitating e-commerce between a customer and a set of pre-
2		selected vendors with whom the customer has an existing relationship, said
3		pre-selected vendors each having an established communication format with
4		the customer, comprising the steps of:
5		(a) accepting over an Internet connection a request from a customer;
6		(b) for each of said pre-selected vendors formatting said request for
7		delivery in the established communication format of the customer
8		with that vendor;
9		(c) delivering in the established communication format said request to
10		each of said pre-selected vendors; and
11		(d) providing to the customer over the Internet a response to said request.

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1 16.   The method of claim 15, wherein said formatting step comprises for each of
2   the pre-selected vendors, the steps of:
3   (1)   obtaining a transmission mode correlated with one of said pre-
4   selected vendors; and
5   (2)   converting said request in accordance with said obtained transmission
6   mode to format said request for that vendor.

1 17.   The method of claim 16, wherein said obtaining step comprises the steps of:
2   (A)   accessing a database containing a set of transmission modes
3   associated with each of a set of vendors;
4   (B)   identifying for each of said pre-selected vendors with whom the
5   customer has an existing relationship an ordered set of transmission
6   modes; and
7   (C)   selecting the transmission mode with a highest order value.

1 18.   The method of claim 16, wherein said delivering step includes transmitting
2   data over a connection selected from the group of: the Internet, an electronic
3   data interface, e-mail, a facsimile machine, and a telephone.

1 19.   The method of claim 15, including the additional step of obtaining
2   vendor-selection data from the customer over the Internet connection, the
3   vendor-selection data defining at least a subset of said set of vendors wherein
4   the vendor-selection data is selected from among a multiplicity of vendors.

1 20.   The method of claim 19, comprising the additional step of associating a part
2   number selection with the vendor-selection data.

1 21.   The method of claim 15, wherein a preexisting buyer/purchaser relationship
2   exists between said customer and said pre-selected vendors.

1 22.   The method of claim 15, wherein said request includes a product identifier.

1 23.   The method of claim 15, wherein said vendors sell products.

1   24.   The method of claim 15, wherein, in the event that there are plural responses,

2   recommending a particular one of the responses based upon predetermined

3   criteria.

1   25.   A method for providing a customer with responses that satisfy a request, the

2   request and responses thereto being conveyed across a distributed computer

3   network between at least a customer station and a host, comprising the steps

4   of:

5   (a)   providing from the customer station a request to purchase a product

6   or service;

7   (b)   providing from the customer station information which relates one or

8   more customer-selected vendors with whom the customer has an

9   existing relationship with the product or service in the request;

10   (c)   receiving from the host any responses to the request from the

11   customer-selected vendors; and

12   (d)   receiving from the host responses to the request from one or more

13   host-approved vendors only upon a prescribed condition.

1   26.   The method as in claim 25, wherein the step of receiving the request from the

2   host-approved vendors is performed automatically upon the prescribed

3   condition being satisfied.

1   27.   The method as in claim 25, wherein the prescribed condition is that the

2   customer-selected vendors collectively cannot fully satisfy the request.

1   28.   The method as in claim 25, wherein the prescribed condition is that no single

2   one of the customer-selected vendors can fully satisfy the request.

1   29.   The method as in claim 25, wherein the responses from the customer-selected

2   vendors and the host-approved vendors are in the form of one of EDI, e-mail,

3   fax, telephone and the host Web site.

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1　　30.　　The method as in claim 25, wherein the host-approved vendor is one of the

2　　　　　　host Web site and a third-party vendor.