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Benefiting From Web-Based Solutions

World Wide Technology seeks to streamline operations and cut costs through strategic partnership

By **Tamara E. Holmes**



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World Wide Technology Inc., the largest African

American-owned company in the U.S. with \$1.4 billion

in sales, is banking on a strategic partnership with

software provider ClearOrbit to lower the company's cost of doing business and increase its bottom line by making it easier to communicate with suppliers and customers.

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Under the terms of the collaboration, WWT, a **BE 100s** firm based in St. Louis, will use Austin, Texas-based ClearOrbit's Purchase Order Collaborator software to keep in touch with suppliers via a Web interface. WWT, which resells information technology products and services, often works with hundreds, or even thousands, of suppliers at a given time. While WWT integrates its systems with its largest suppliers, it has in the past had to rely on manual methods to keep in touch with smaller ones, says Mark Franke, vice president of information technology for WWT.

"When you have a supply base that might be 700 or 800 companies strong, how do you communicate with 600 to 700 suppliers that you do not integrate with," says Franke. "That's really the big challenge."

The companies announced at the beginning of June that WWT had deployed the software to 65 to 75 of its suppliers. Franke expects that number to rise again to 700 within two months.

Experts agree that many firms can benefit from using similar technologies. "Web-based solutions can naturally streamline a company's operations since they allow different users of the system to easily input their data so that it can be retrieved by other users without a lot of software compatibility issues involved," says Kimbell Wiggins, president and CEO of KS Wiggins Inc., a Washington, D.C.-based information technology company that performs systems integration for companies and government agencies.

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WWT hopes the tool will help it to increase its network of suppliers, which will then allow it to increase what it can do for customers and clients.

“It’s definitely an advantage to us from a new business perspective because the big challenge for any engagement that we get involved with is how quickly can we ramp up, how quickly can we get all these suppliers engaged,” says Franke. “This tool is a huge efficiency gain from an engagement standpoint. We can turn up hundreds of suppliers in weeks rather than months.”

While WWT will not disclose which suppliers it is using the ClearOrbit system with, they say it will be used to automate some of the purchases between a major automotive Original Equipment Manufacturer customer and about 900 suppliers.

For ClearOrbit, the move gives the company a chance to showcase its technology to WWT’s FORTUNE 500 customer base.

“World Wide Technology has been a true innovator in the supply chain industry. Their sophisticated procurement, distribution, and outsource services have been a key factor in their rapid growth,” says Tom Dziersk, president and CEO of ClearOrbit. “We’re proud that ClearOrbit’s solutions enable World Wide Technology’s vision of providing revolutionary supply chain services to their customers. We look forward to expanding our strategic partnership as we tackle new opportunities together in the future.”

While WWT paid undisclosed licensing costs to use the software, the company ultimately expects to reap a financial reward.

“Ultimately what [the software] does is it drives down the costs of the ordering process. Without the ability to communicate with our suppliers, it becomes somewhat of a manual process to generate purchase orders, to accept invoices, to get promised dates, and things like that,” says Franke. “So by automating this via this kind of connection, it’s going to be a pretty huge advantage.”

06/20/05

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