

**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.

- 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.

