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## Executive summary

The Internet presents eBusinesses with revenue opportunities and customer service challenges. The Web opens the world to the smallest enterprises, leveling the competitive playing field but also raising customer expectations. With time and geographic boundaries eliminated, customers expect superior, consistent, 24x7 service. Diminished customer loyalty is a natural by-product of today's Web-enabled economy, which means companies can no longer afford to operate segregated islands of customer data across the enterprise. Indeed, it is a competitive requirement that successful eBusinesses raise customer service to a strategic level. They must deploy consistent and synchronized electronic customer relationship management (eCRM) systems that support all customer communication channels (phone, e-mail, Web) through linkages with all front- and back-office applications and business functions across the entire enterprise. Simply put, today's eBusinesses that refuse to heed the message that the eCustomer is more powerful and elusive than ever will be out of business tomorrow.

## eCommerce Successes vs. Customer Service Issues

First the good news. Due in large part to an extremely successful 1999 holiday season, eTailers enjoyed an outstanding year, and their successes show every indication of continued expansion. Sales for the 1999 holiday season grew far more vigorously than some forecasts had anticipated—increasing about 400 percent from a year earlier to upwards of \$8 billion. Added good news for online retailers is the fact that most online shoppers surveyed by eCommerce researchers expressed satisfaction with their online experiences.

Now the bad news. While it's clear there are enormous opportunities on the Web, many eCommerce sites continue to suffer their share of customer service snafus. Some customer complaints are serious enough—out-of-stock items, orders delivered late or not at all, sites too complex to navigate, no way to talk with actual human beings, and extremely unsatisfactory e-mail response times—that many shoppers say they are unlikely to return to those poorly run sites.

When “click-and-mortar” and eCommerce merchants do not offer better customer service online than physical brick-and-mortar stores, that's business as usual. And online shopkeepers who do not recognize that the customer is still king—especially on the Web, where competition is virtually a click away—may find that the 1999 holiday season was their last.

eBusinesses able to recognize that Web-based commerce attracts increasingly demanding shoppers and requires better-than-ever customer service stand to gain dramatically. With customer service front and center as the defining ingredient for successful eBusinesses, online merchants can strengthen relationships with their existing clientele and develop strong affinities with new ones by providing excellent service to customers whether they contact the company by phone, e-mail, or the Web.

## The Web Changes Everything

The Internet has not only changed the way people shop, communicate, and live, but it has also changed the way companies do business. Since the Web removes geographic and time-zone barriers, the smallest online merchant becomes a global enterprise and must be able to compete effectively with larger, more established corporations. The Internet has even altered perennial notions about customers. Customers still reign supreme—perhaps even more than before, given their new electronic powers—but companies that venture into eCommerce soon discover a new adage as well: “The customer is just a click away.”

Indeed, the Web's popularity and ease of use enable customers to demand, and obtain, 24x7 service and support. If they don't get just that, with a simple click of the mouse they're off to someone else's site to compare offerings. In fact, as consumers increasingly use the Web to shop and to conduct other business, they expect consistent, superior service at every point of contact. “Online consumers are demanding,” notes market researcher Forrester Research. “Web buyers expect deep product information, real-time order confirmation and status, and around-the-clock customer service.”

A quick look at the numbers illustrates the growing fragility of customer loyalty in an eCommerce world. Some 75 percent of dissatisfied online shoppers abandoned their shopping carts during the months of August through October last year, according to BizRate.com, an eCommerce rating and market research firm, and the NPD Group, a consumer panel researcher. BizRate/NPD found also that 39 percent of those disgruntled potential customers bought nothing at all, while 26 percent purchased products from competitors.

Consider the statistics: 65 of every 100 visitors to your site can “walk out,” or click away, without spending a penny. Worse yet, you've lost a quarter of those visitors to your competition. That threatening scenario becomes increasingly likely for eMerchants that provide inconsistent levels of service to customers contacting the company through different channels. And that's almost certain to

be the case for companies with disparate silos of customer information serving assorted customer touch-points.

The Internet has raised the stakes throughout the entire customer service industry. Customers simply expect eBusinesses to provide more functionality—order tracking, streamlined order processing, and self-help capabilities—no matter how they interact with a company. And they expect that service now, in Internet time. The service must also be consistently excellent across the enterprise. Notes Robert Mirani, director of customer relationship management with market researcher Yankee Group, “The increasing sophistication of electronic customer-care solutions becomes impossible for customer-care managers to ignore.”

Don Peppers, a partner with CRM consultancy Peppers and Rogers Group, points out the need for competitive eBusinesses to incorporate the Internet into their customer-support strategies. “To conduct relationships cost-effectively with thousands or millions of customers, the Web is almost indispensable because there’s almost no other cost-efficient way to do that,” says Peppers.

## CRM Becomes eCRM

Customer relationship management (CRM) has gone through a metamorphosis over time. What began as disconnected sales force automation (SFA) software from vendors such as Siebel Systems, Vantive, and Clarify has become corporate-level strategic eCRM systems for eBusinesses seeking to deliver consistent and integrated customer service.

CRM software can incorporate a broad range of functionality, from low-end contact management to comprehensive suites that govern an organization’s front-office marketing, sales, and customer support operations. As customers increasingly contact companies via e-mail and the Web, a growing number of vendors, including enterprise resource planning (ERP) suppliers like PeopleSoft (through its acquisition of Vantive), Oracle, and SAP AG, have responded by extending their eCRM software offerings to incorporate more customer management capabilities. Aspect Communications, with its Aspect® Customer Relationship Portal software, enables companies to provide an integrated solutions to blending customer contact methods with enterprise systems in a single system.

Using eCRM software such as Aspect’s, organizations can provide their customers with uniform service and support quickly and easily, no matter what the customer contact method. That means complete and relevant information can be made available, in real time, across the enterprise. Essentially, eCRM software today involves all front-end, back-office, and third-party processes that “touch” customers—from the contact center that handles customer orders, to the customer’s bank for credit card authorization, to the inventory system to check for product availability, and the warehouse for fulfillment and delivery.

**“Evolution of CRM” from Aberdeen’s “Customer Relationship Portals: Managing Customers in an E-Business World” report.**

**Figure 1: CRM evolves into eCRM**

	Pre-E-Business	Early E-Business	Maturing E-Business
Description of CRM	Call center with some front-office apps	Contact center with front-office apps Transaction-oriented Web site	Corporate-spanning strategy for consistent, unified customer interactions
Customer Contact Channels	Phone, fax over PSTN	Phone, fax, emerging e-mail and Web	Phone, fax, e-mail, Web, emerging video and IP telephony
Level of Integration	Limited call center to front-office	Call center to front-office, some back-office, limited channel integration	Full call center/front-office/back-office Full channel integration Interaction integration based on business rules, workflow Integrated decision support

**Consistent customer service across all customer communication channels requires interconnected solutions that link the enterprise and the various contact channels.**

Source: Aberdeen Group

The benefits of integrated eCRM systems are well documented. The better and more comprehensive the data that companies can compile about their customers through automated customer management processes, the more effectively their global sales and customer support forces can collaborate and share data in real time, manage that data throughout an enterprise, and access it at any time. By tightly integrating CRM systems with the Web and back-end ERP packages, organizations can reduce operational costs, increase sales, and enhance customer service. One West Coast electronics manufacturer, for example, was able to shrink its order-processing time by 90 percent after linking its front-office sales and marketing applications with its back-end order entry system and the Web. Similarly, a financial services company in the Midwest achieved more than a 360 percent return on its Web-enabled CRM investment within 14 months of going live after a similar integration of systems.

Customer management capabilities linked to the Internet are fast becoming a competitive requirement for any eBusiness that hopes to succeed. Today, almost 60 percent of large companies use the Web to serve customers, according to market research firm Yankee Group. Some 55 percent of the remaining organizations that Yankee surveyed last year expect to incorporate the Web as a customer touch-point by the end of 2000.

## Explosive Growth of the eCRM Market

The eCRM market is booming, with some analysts calling it the fastest-growing enterprise application field. It's small wonder then that vendors of all sizes and types are targeting the market with solutions that tightly link the Web and back-end systems. For one thing, eTailer sales numbers are enticing. BizRate.com believes total retail eCommerce sales for 2000 will be \$39.6 billion, up from \$15.6 billion in 1999. Those numbers are especially impressive considering that the National Retail Federation in Washington, D.C., estimates overall U.S. retail sales grew only about 9 percent last year.

Analysts expect online shopping revenue to continue to grow robustly, at 145 percent annually, according to Shop.org, the trade association of online retailers, and The Boston Consulting Group. Forrester Research believes that more than 40 million U.S. households will shop online by 2003, producing \$108 billion in revenues and accounting for 6 percent of U.S. consumer retail spending.

Additionally, despite reports of widespread customer service problems, some 90 percent of online holiday shoppers expressed satisfaction with their 1999 Web shopping experiences. That's up from 74 percent during the previous year's holiday season, according to Jupiter Communications. Further analysis finds even more satisfied online shoppers. More than 95 percent of some 4,740 shoppers surveyed after the holidays say customer service met or bettered their expectations, especially delivery and exchange performance, according to PC Data Online, a Web measurement service, and investment banking and securities firm Goldman, Sachs & Co.

With the potential market opportunities that await eTailers with the ability to satisfy their customers, it's easy to understand why the eCRM market itself is exploding. AMR Research Inc. predicts CRM sales are growing at a 49 percent compound annual growth rate and will reach \$16.8 billion by 2003—up from \$3.7 billion in 1999. Worldwide CRM service revenues, including consulting, systems integration, and outsourcing, will reach \$90 billion by 2003, according to market researcher International Data Corp.

**Figure 2: Total CRM Revenue, 1998–2003 Forecast**

1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
\$2.3B	\$3.7B	\$5.4B	\$7.9B	\$11.5B	\$16.5B

**The CRM market is expected to grow at a robust 49 percent rate through 2003.**

Source: AMR Research, Inc.

Based on total company revenues for 1998, AMR pegs Siebel, Vantive, and Clarify as the top CRM vendors. ERP (enterprise resource planning) suppliers Oracle and Baan Co. round out the top five, all of whom contributed 40 percent of overall CRM revenue, according to AMR. Given the potential growth rate in the CRM space, which exceeds the rate of ERP growth (estimated at 32 percent CAGR by AMR), it's also easy to see why vendors such as Oracle, PeopleSoft, and SAP are aggressively going after CRM business.

Aspect Communications, as a provider of eCRM solutions, offers software that complements and integrates with front-office functionality from Siebel and other top CRM vendors. Aspect developed its front-office applications as part of an alliance with Siebel to provide out-of-the-box integration between the Aspect Customer Relationship Portal software platform and Siebel Call Center and Siebel eService applications.

The alliance enables Aspect and Siebel customers to deploy quickly and cost-effectively an eBusiness strategy that can optimize customer relationships through every customer interaction channel. The combination of Aspect's workforce-management software, Aspect Portal applications, and Siebel eBusiness software enables companies to integrate operational data with workforce management solutions for a real-time view of resource availability, enabling agents to adapt quickly for maximum customer responsiveness.

## Customer Service: the Strategic Requirement for eCRM Solutions

No longer front-office add-ons to ERP applications, eCRM solutions that integrate an eBusiness's entire customer service infrastructure have become strategic necessities. Experts point out that companies implement ERP solutions to cut costs and automate internal business processes. They deploy eCRM systems to reduce costs and increase sales.

Analysts estimate that a company will spend 4 to 10 times as much to obtain one new customer as it will to keep an existing one. Studies also show that companies can boost profits by almost 100 percent by retaining just 5 percent of their customers. Combined with the assertion by market research firm Meta Group, Inc., that 35 percent of all customer interactions this year will be through electronic methods, it's clear that to preserve customers, companies must offer consistent service across all customer interaction channels throughout the enterprise.

"Companies need to treat CRM holistically and from the customer's point of view," according to Meta Group. "Implementing one component without consideration of the others creates a stovepipe solution that is less effective and more costly."

Potential revenue losses for eBusinesses without a synchronized eCRM strategy are staggering. Such eCommerce sites stood to lose \$3.2 billion in 1999 sales—double the losses in 1998, according to Datamonitor, a market analysis firm. "As the level of online customer service fails to keep up with the growth in e-commerce, online shopping growth is actually increasing abandoned transaction losses," says a recent Datamonitor study. "More significantly, by 2002, businesses that fail to Web-enable their customer service operations will be immobilized to respond to the growth in online buyers and will lose significant market share to their Web-enabled competitors."

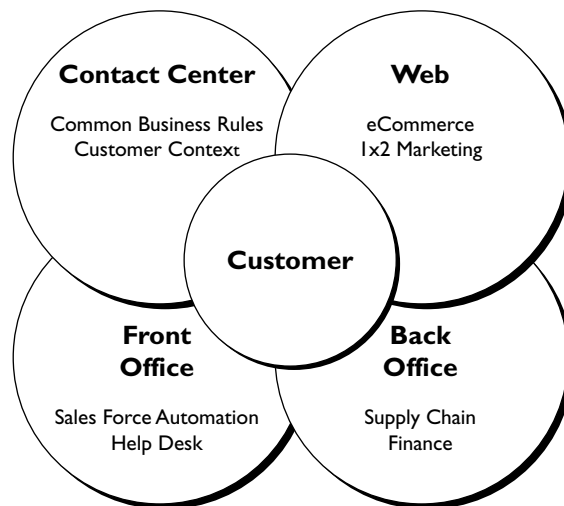
Approximately 184 million of 263 million attempted online purchase transactions during 1998 were abandoned because of poor customer service, notes Datamonitor. With the average online consumer spending \$85 per transaction, Datamonitor estimates that the 69 percent of abandoned shopping carts translates to \$1.6 billion in revenues lost during 1998.

eCommerce clearly changes the way companies do business. But eBusiness is more than just selling and shopping on the Internet. eBusiness involves enhanced customer service through closer online

links with suppliers and trading partners. An eBusiness must synchronize a company's eCommerce, customer service, and supply-chain strategies into an integrated, enterprisewide system that enables real-time, interdepartmental access to customer data to ensure superior, personalized service to all customers. Amazon.com is the model eCompany for personalized services. Amazon's software remembers buyers' past selections, favorite authors, and category preferences; suggests purchases based on those choices; and notifies consumers via e-mail when books matching their preferences are available.

Internet technology enables and even forces companies to operate more efficiently with customers and partners, bring new products to market faster, serve customers better, and adjust ever faster to quickly shifting market changes—and to do it all better than their competitors. To achieve all that, eBusinesses must improve and integrate core business processes, from the customer-facing contact center to back-office systems.

To deliver an eCRM strategy that extends front-office sales force automation functionality beyond isolated sales, marketing, and customer support departments, an eBusiness must synchronize its eCommerce and CRM solutions with multimedia contact centers, back-office applications, Web servers, and a variety of other internal and third-party systems and platforms. Customer support systems that coordinate phone, fax, e-mail, and Web-based self-service capabilities help eBusinesses manage customer profiles, contact center information, and sales histories through each point of customer interaction. The solutions also enable consumers to enter orders, track account status, and solicit support via the Web as seamlessly as if they were phoning a customer service agent or meeting face to face with a bank loan officer.



**Figure 3: Customer-Centric Convergence**

**Successful eBusinesses must synchronize eCommerce and eCRM with customer-facing multimedia contact center and back-office applications.**

Source: Aspect Communications

Products and services that integrate front- and back-office technologies are necessary to support eCRM. One in particular, the Aspect Customer Relationship Portal, provides the customer service infrastructure needed to eliminate corporate silos that segregate customer data from the Web, the contact center, back-end transactional systems, relational databases, and data warehouses. The Aspect Portal forms the foundation for an effective eBusiness system by integrating enterprise resources, coordinating customer transactions, and managing end-to-end business processes.

## Opportunities for Customer-Savvy eBusinesses

eCommerce presents eBusinesses with significant new market opportunities. The Internet economy offers expanded, global markets and the ability to grow revenues at lower costs while attracting and retaining customers through personalized service.

Additionally, most online shoppers were pleased with their electronic buying experiences during the 1999 holiday season. A PC Data Online/Goldman Sachs survey found that 97 percent of more than 4,700 home-based Internet users expressed satisfaction with their online buying experiences. Fewer than 4 percent of online shoppers surveyed said eTailers did not meet expectations; less than 1 percent said online retailers significantly underperformed.

Of those shoppers critical of the holiday online buying experience, more than 60 percent said their items of choice were sometimes, often, or always out of stock. Some 46 percent of those surveyed stated they sometimes bought items from the site if an item of choice were not available; 42.2 percent said they never purchased a different item. Cameron Meierhoefer, Internet analyst for PC Data Online, believes the survey suggests that even eShoppers who visit sites with specific purchases in mind are “open to options and opportunities.”

“Overall, [1999 holiday season] winners had their acts together from site to warehouse to customer support,” notes Paul Bates, information products group vice president with BizRate.com. “Losers failed to inform consumers about product availability, shipping deadlines, and return policies.”

Clearly, eCommerce opportunities abound for eBusinesses with superior customer service. Traditional retailers that have established an online presence may have the most to gain. The so-called click-and-mortar companies have a potential advantage over pure eTailers because their physical presence could make it easier and more convenient for online shoppers to pick up and return products, according to First Albany Corp.’s FAC/Equities. Some 16 of 30 click-and-mortar retailers surveyed by FAC/Equities say they allow customers to return goods bought online to a local store.

Despite the wealth of good news and market opportunities, there’s little question that poor customer service could be the death knell for eMerchants. Companies that failed to satisfy online consumers during the 1999 holiday season—including retailers with established physical presence—now face disgruntled customers unhappy about out-of-stock items, orders delivered late or not at all, delivery of the wrong products, difficult-to-use Web sites, complex ordering processes, and generally insufficient online customer support. In short, says Jupiter Communications, eTailers have virtually no chance of retaining disaffected shoppers.

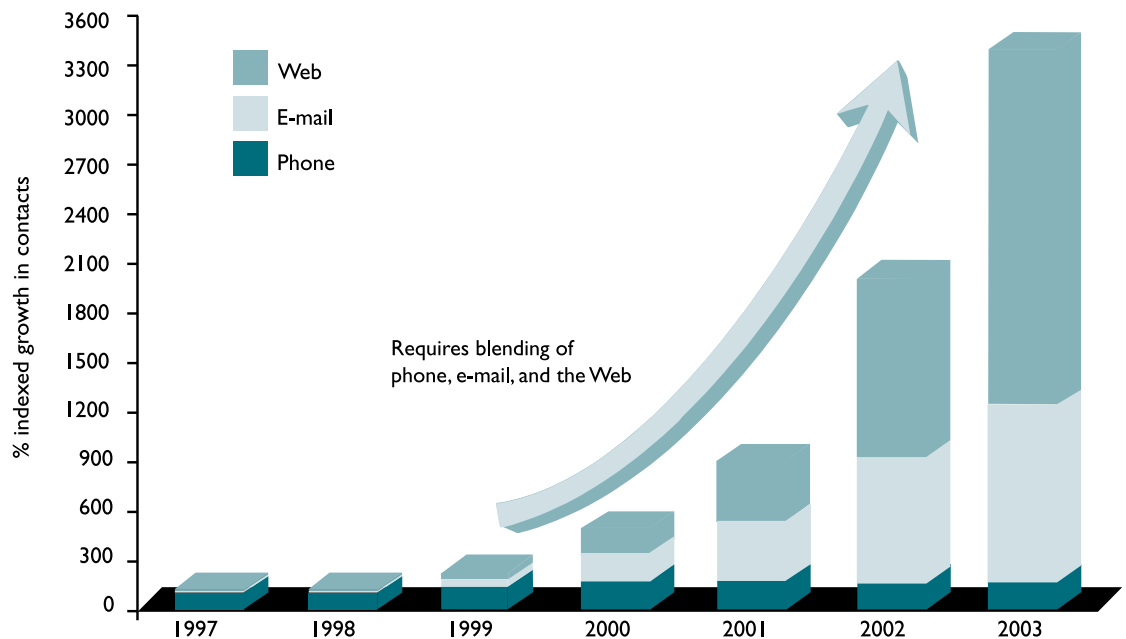
### Untapped potential of e-mail

One of the most accepted means of electronic communication, e-mail is underutilized by eCommerce sites, contributing to the disaffection of online shoppers. When customers choose e-mail as a contact medium and the eCommerce site does not support it, customer satisfaction plummets. Unfortunately, Web sites’ e-mail failure rates are increasing. According to Jupiter Communications, during the third quarter of 1999, some 46 percent of the top 125 Web sites took five or more days to respond to a request, never responded, or had no e-mail address for customer inquiries. The figure represents a substantial increase from the 38 percent rate that Jupiter found during the same period in 1998. FAC/Equities reports similarly dismaying results. E-mail response times from click-and-mortar companies ranged from 20 minutes to three days, including five sites that had no response and one site that had no e-mail capability at all.

“Many Web ventures are ignoring the opportunity to communicate with existing and potential customers, discouraging brand loyalty, and opting out of a user-initiated, one-to-one relationship by delaying, eliminating, or not offering responses to e-mail,” says Cormac Foster, an analyst with Jupiter Communications’ site operation strategies practice.

There is a positive aspect, however, to the overall decline in e-mail customer response rates. eBusinesses that are eCRM-savvy have an enormous opportunity “to differentiate their efforts based on customer service performance,” says Ken Allard, vice president of Jupiter’s technology and operations research.

**Figure 4: Customer Contact Methods**



**Customers increasingly require a blending of contact via the phone, e-mail, and the Web**

Source: Forrester Research

### Support during the buying process

Forrester Research points out that while many retailers look at customer service as a postsale problem-solving effort, eTail customers expect support as soon as they enter Web sites. Specifically, 19 percent of customers require service during shopping to find and learn about products; 21 percent have questions during the buying process about billing, receipts, and the checkout process; 50 percent keep tabs on order and shipping status; and 19 percent of purchasers have questions about returns.

Forrester emphasizes the importance of customer service that anticipates and solves issues before they occur. They want such proactive functionality as delivery and shipping options, detailed product data, and appropriate product suggestions. For reactive service, customers expect fast response, easy returns, and speedy order-tracking capabilities.

Web-based self-service options certainly facilitate an online customer’s ability to order products and track orders and delivery status. eBusinesses, however, are finding that such applications actually increase, rather than diminish, customer service requirements. eTailers reach far larger audiences than brick-and-mortar retailers can reach, and more customers generate more service requests across all communication modes. The Internet also enables 24x7 access, which enables customers to make requests more often.

The challenges involved in operating eBusinesses linked with CRM, ERP, and other systems can be enormous. eBusinesses store customer and business information in CRM databases, Web servers, ERP applications, and other back-end systems throughout the enterprise. To access different systems, contact center agents often have to use disparate systems with different interfaces. To track their orders, customers need Web access to data running on back-end billing and ordering systems and accounts receivable/payable systems. Additionally, eTailers must interact with customers' banks for approval or denial of credit card transactions.

With such formidable challenges, perhaps it's not surprising that Jupiter Communications reports only 37 percent of Web ventures currently combine three or more customer service channels. Since many of those organizations implement integrated customer-support capabilities "inappropriately," Jupiter analysts urge eBusinesses to employ automated, multichannel customer service strategies.

Complete eBusiness functionality requires the ability to manage the entire customer experience from start to finish. That means compiling detailed customer profile data to help with eMarketing, detailed customer history information to support cross-selling and up-selling, and accurate reporting to assist with detailed customer follow-up. With an isolated silo approach, customers entering service requests via the Web or e-mail often can't track the status of that request by phoning a customer service agent in a traditional call center.

eCRM integrated solutions support enhanced, consistent customer service across all customer interaction channels. The convergence of front-office applications with back-office business processes enables companies to link their eCommerce operations with customer information databases to track transactions, personalize Web pages, and automate customer service processes.

**Figure 5: Aspect Portal Enables Next Generation eBusiness System**

<b>Portal Applications</b>	<b>Easy to build – easy to deploy</b>
<b>eBusiness Architect</b>	<b>Develop business rules not code</b>
<b>Customer Relationship Portal</b>	<b>Consistent interaction, integration, and information</b>
<b>Aspect DataMart</b>	<b>Real-time customer data</b>
<b>NT Server</b>	<b>Open standards</b>

**The next-generation eBusiness system will eliminate islands of business isolation by synchronizing front- and back-office functionality, the multimedia customer contact center, and customer and business intelligence into one system.**

Source: Aspect Communications

Synchronizing an eBusinesses's customer service applications with the Web, back-office, and other systems offers many benefits—and requirements. Indeed, many products and solutions promise such integration capabilities. Consider, however, Jupiter Communications' findings that 44 percent of 27 major eCommerce sites surveyed have yet to complete real-time integration of Web and contact center operations, and 46 percent have no real-time inventory management capabilities. In addition, some 80 percent of Web storefronts have no connection with back-end ERP fulfillment systems, says Steve Bonadio, Meta Group's application delivery strategies program director.

“One of the biggest challenges for companies that are trying to sell online is linking their Web sites in real time with their previously offline systems,” say Jupiter analysts. “Sites that do not have the ability to sell from accurate inventory risk confirming orders to consumers that they cannot fulfill or can only fulfill at a much later date.”

## Computer Media Integration

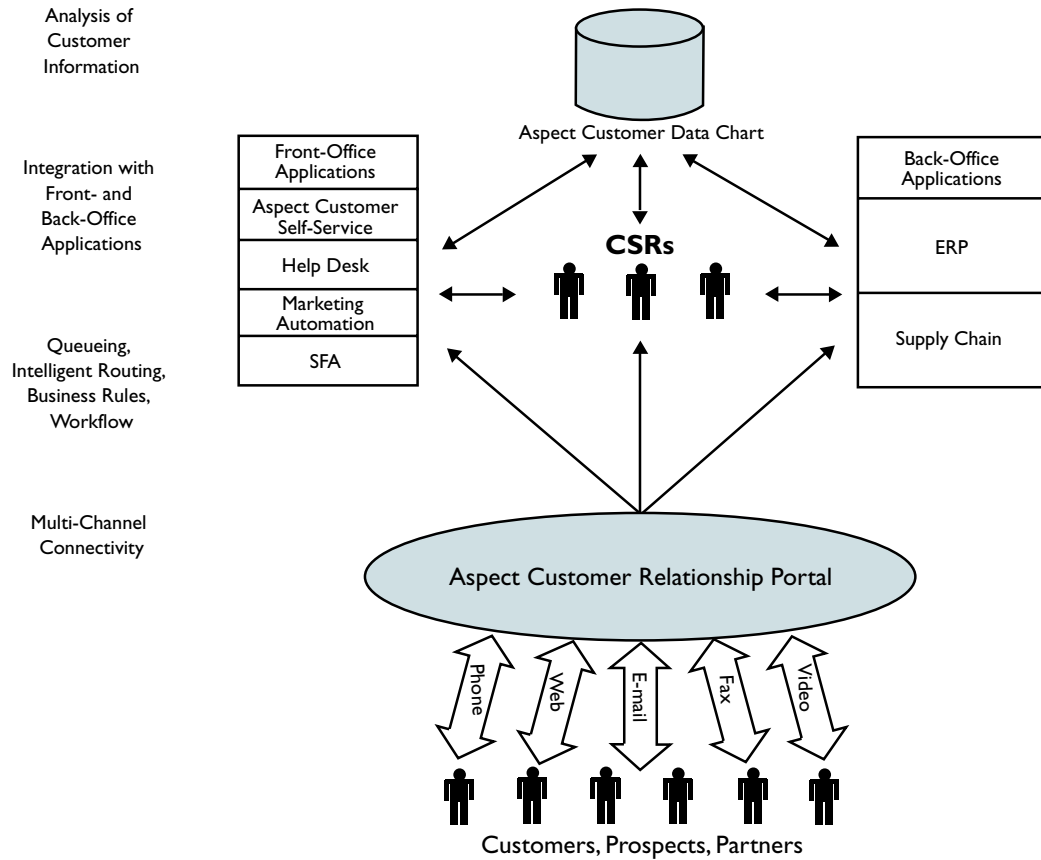
In the pre-eBusiness world, telephony-based call centers were able to meet companies' customer support needs. But today, customer communications channels have merged into multimedia contact centers. What Aberdeen Group calls “simple multichannel connectivity” is insufficient for eBusiness customer service. Clearly, the mission of a successful eBusiness is to synchronize all communications channels with all enterprise applications and business functions.

Aspect Communications makes computer media integration a possibility, both for customer support needs and for workforce management. The Aspect Portal's CMI™ software extends existing CTI (computer-telephony integration) capabilities, such as screen pop and call routing, to the Web and e-mail contacts. As a result, the Aspect Portal brings together all the elements critical to a strategic approach to eCRM, according to Aberdeen Group. The Aspect Portal becomes the intelligent hub that enables front- and back-office applications to work together, thus synchronizing all customer communications channels according to well-defined business rules.

For complete computer media integration, the Aspect Customer Relationship Portal:

- Manages customer interactions through multiple communications channels (phone, e-mail, Web)
- Defines and applies business rules to customer interactions
- Routes customer interactions, according to business rules, to appropriate available resources
- Integrates disparate corporate data into customer interactions
- Integrates a decision-support system via a data mart
- Broadcasts real-time status of available resources to other applications

**Figure 6: The Aspect Customer Relationship Portal**



**The Aspect Customer Relationship Portal is the intelligent “nerve center” that enables applications to work together according to well-defined business rules.**

Source: Aberdeen Group

## Computer Media Integration and eWorkforce Management

eCRM has a powerful impact on a company’s workforce as well. Traditional workforce management solutions deal only with the effect of customer phone calls on the organization. eBusinesses obviously require far more complex workforce management automation, or eWorkforce management. A company must have an environment in which all customer contacts (phone, e-mail, Web interactions) merge into the same multimedia contact center, and one in which an eWorkforce management solution schedules all corporate resources.

Multiple customer touch points require eBusinesses to meet response times that range from answering the phone immediately to responding via e-mail within minutes or hours. Organizations must assemble, plan, and budget for the appropriate skills to handle the different media.

The benefits of eWorkforce management are tangible. eWorkforce management solutions can help eBusinesses improve customer satisfaction by deploying appropriate resources and reducing average customer hold time. It can also decrease overstaffing costs and raise revenue opportunities by shrinking the number of sales lost through abandoned contacts. In addition, eWorkforce management enables companies to spend less time on planning, scheduling, and managing employees and more time on strategic planning. The Aspect eWorkforce management products effectively deliver these benefits as part of the company’s overall strategy of complete eCRM solutions.

## eBusinesses Need eFlows

One key component of the Aspect Portal is its graphical development environment, which enables the creation of “eFlows,” or the visual representation of end-to-end business processes. eFlows allow eBusinesses to integrate a variety of workflow processes into a single, electronically defined workflow. The end result for customers is that they can place orders, request support anytime from anywhere, obtain near-immediate responses, and track the entire process online. eFlows also provide real-time information for time-critical customer interactions and capture the business logic in one central repository. Indeed, Aberdeen says that Aspect’s eFlow engine provides all the tools required to “define, administer, and execute business rules throughout all CRM-related applications.”

The Aspect Portal is further enhanced in its support of eCRM strategies with the company’s data mart product, a central, open data repository that pulls data from different sources, such as contact centers, e-mail, relational databases, and CRM packages. eBusinesses use the data mart to analyze customer interaction data, improve business rules for handling customer interactions, and provide the data and reports necessary for more effective eWorkforce and system management, according to Aberdeen.

## Customer Service—a Competitive Necessity

Customer service is critical for eBusinesses in today’s Internet world. eBusinesses not able to support their customers via all customer touch points may even find themselves subject to federal sanctions for failure to provide on-time delivery of products ordered online. Disgruntled online shoppers are already taking their frustrations out in class-action lawsuits. Yet sanctions may not be an eBusiness’s worst nightmare. Losing existing and potential customers’ business to online competitors could represent even greater problems in terms of lost revenues—and become an even more tangible threat.

eBusinesses face a host of hurdles in synchronizing their customer support solutions to the Web and other customer delivery channels. However, providing excellent, consistent customer service across multiple customer touch points in an eBusiness world is no longer a luxury—it is a competitive necessity.



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