



Beyond **humanly possible**

Until fairly recently, e-business tools were a rare sight in the South African aerospace industry. Some original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) had implemented enterprise resource planning (ERP) tools to manage their supply chains, but the links between them and their local suppliers were tenuous.

The hunt for an e-business tool that would break down the barriers between players in the industry was on, and many OEMs have sought new methodologies and technologies while others persisted with the old way of doing things, involving much human intervention in data maintenance and communicating with suppliers. The time was ripe for change. The aerospace industry is known for long lead times from raw materials to manufacture and a heavy dependence on forecasting and inventory management tools to keep the supply chain functioning as optimally as is humanly possible, continuing to shy away from new technology and tools no longer made sense.

Some of the tools one finds in the United States are simply too integration-heavy and dependent on existing back-office infrastructure. They weren't viable in South Africa because local suppliers seldom have the sort of infrastructure in place that is capable of integrating with the OEM's inventory and purchasing systems. What the industry needed was a standard Web Interface which allowed all suppliers to consult it for details of new purchase orders, coupled with standards-based electronic notification systems allowing for the eventual possibility of

integrating with whichever system a supplier chose to implement, if and when the time for that came.

With such a platform in place, users were able to stretch beyond the boundaries of what is humanly possible, as a secure login provides suppliers and OEMs with varying degrees of enhanced visibility into what is in stock, where an order is in the cycle to fulfilment, and so on. Far less human intervention is needed, greatly reducing the likelihood and opportunity for error.

The automotive industry today has such a platform, one with proven ability in supply chains as complex and intricate as that of the automotive industry's. Web-based, with the possibility of hosting enterprise applications, and with the future-proof, flexible functionality that takes industry incumbents as far into e-business as is required of them by their trading partners, it should work for aerospace too.

It will do so by exposing local supply chains, some of them none-too-sophisticated, to a global state of e-business equality. It will simplify communications and trading processes with a standardised communications process, shorten long supply chain lead times, close the loop of communications between suppliers and OEMs, provide auditable visibility into the supply chain, and cut costs. And that's more than any number of proprietary ERP systems, forecasting and inventory tools and sophisticated skills can provide in the current circumstances. +

JOHAN STEYN

MD: Aerosud Interiors

“Continuing to shy away from new technology and tools no longer made sense. Standardisation was needed.”