



HOW THE RIGHT ECOMMERCE PLATFORM **ADDS VALUE TO YOUR BUSINESS**

A white paper by Univar Environmental Sciences



WHEN YOUR BUSINESS DEPENDS ON IT.™



For professionals operating in pest management, wildlife management, public health, and other fields dependent on specialty chemical products and equipment, online ordering is now a purchasing reality. Long delayed by the inadequate availability of industry-specific ecommerce platforms, purchasers now have the choice of several digital storefronts from which to research and order chemicals, hardware, and other necessary materials.

With increasing options, however, comes difficulty in choosing the right distribution partner. Professionals who may have relied on traditional phone/fax/mail ordering systems for years must now weigh the pros and cons of multiple modern ecommerce experiences.

What are the key features I should be looking for in an ecommerce storefront? Which purchasing platform offers the greatest advantages? And how do those advantages translate into value for my business?

Some professionals find it easier to avoid confronting these questions, defaulting instead to the online portal of their preferred distributor. Yet doing so could mean a substantial opportunity cost, landing on an inferior platform that costs more time, money, and attention to use than a best-in-class solution.

Through the lens of our own efforts to build a better online store, this white paper seeks to answer the questions professionals face when choosing a purchasing platform. We will discuss how Univar addressed common user issues, and what features we implemented to add significant value to our customers' business operations.

OPERATIONAL CONTROL, ORDERING EFFICIENCY, INVENTORY PLANNING

Core Features That Create Value for Ecommerce-Ready Customers

Purchasers who are heavily invested in an existing ordering system (traditional or digital), must see a meaningful dollars-and-cents advantage before switching to a new platform. And while a price comparison may seem like the easiest comparison point between storefronts, the difference may not be great enough across all products to warrant an ecosystem shift — assuming pricing is even publicly available at all.

A Feature-Based Value Paradigm

When creating the Univar Online Store, we therefore set out to establish value with features that generate value. Unlike a price-based advantage that can shift at any time (either on the supply side or when customer product needs change), features can create immediate, demonstrable value and solve customer problems. Features can also be planned around, and viewed as a “floor” upon which additional functionality and value are built.

In order to determine what these features would be, we first considered what the basic advantages of a modern ecommerce platform are in contrast with existing solutions. We compiled information internally, externally, competitively, and across industries to outline three key areas where we could create value: Operational Control, Ordering Efficiency, Inventory Planning.





Value Opportunity: Operational Control

In a traditional ordering environment, control over exactly who is allowed to purchase, when they may do so, and how much they may spend, must all be managed by leadership at the purchasing company.

For large organizations, this can represent an enormous burden of oversight, communication, and security. For smaller companies, communication isn't an issue; however, the sheer complexity of necessary purchasing oversight decisions can quickly become overwhelming.

Ecommerce presents the opportunity to automatically designate and enforce the desired buyer/distributor relationship. When creating the Univar Online Store, we therefore built in features that would enable and support this type of operational control to the highest degree possible.

Problem-Solving Features

One of the most important features to operational control is **proper role management** for everyone in the purchasing organization. When designing the Univar Online Store, it was paramount that account owners could easily add users to their company's account and designate purchasing permissions.

This feature greatly cuts down communication confusion and enhances purchasing security, since owners can revoke permissions at any time, and users are never forced to share logins or passwords to make a purchase — they just need the necessary permissions.

An oversight feature unique to the Univar Online Store is **distributor order validation**. While the digital features of any storefront certainly present some of the most obvious value, we found ourselves in the position to personally review every online order.

Our professionals check everything that comes in, looking out for obvious mistakes in areas like quantity and product selection. The ability to leverage deep professional experience in our industry, as well as extensive regional and per-customer knowledge, gives us the opportunity to prevent simple ordering errors. When any are found (or suspected), we follow-up with a phone call to double-check.



Value Opportunity: Ordering Efficiency

While ordering products by mail, phone, and fax have served pest control and other industries well for decades, the process has rarely been an efficient one. Finding and filling out forms, remembering product names and SKUs, and submitting them without incident all contribute to slowdowns and mistakes that ultimately reduce efficiency throughout the purchasing company.

Ecommerce as a whole has always promised to alleviate some of these problems. However, not every platform was designed to accommodate the types of company structures we find our customers require.

Problem-Solving Features

In addition to **role management** outlined previously, Univar implemented **quick lists** that allow managers to designate frequently purchased or seasonally relevant products.

Users with appropriate permissions can see these lists, and order or reorder products directly from them — without the risk of choosing an incorrect SKU. While simple in nature, quick lists support the inherent managerial structure of a company, and reduce the need for back-and-forth communication that could be misremembered or misinterpreted.

Similarly, we decided to make each company's **complete order history** visible to any user with appropriate permissions. Including purchases made via both the Univar Online Store and traditional ordering systems, this history provides additional guidance to those with purchasing power, while simultaneously decreasing the need to locate and reference obscure paper files. In tandem with **distributor order validation** as noted previously, these features can markedly increase the speed and accuracy of product ordering.



Value Opportunity: Inventory Planning

Managing inventory is among one of the most demanding and common challenges facing professionals we service. In addition to keeping adequate stock of products with daily or weekly demand, companies operating in pest management, wildlife management, public health, and related fields must account for seasonal variation, as well as concerns of overstock and product degradation.

Even before our work on an online storefront, inventory planning and management was a strength for Univar. Our employees, experienced in their customers' lines of work, can and do engage with customers to advise them on product inventory concerns and opportunities. Carrying over that ability to an online platform was important for us because we saw it as a clearly differentiating feature.

Problem-Solving Features

To some extent, in-person advice cannot be translated to any autonomous system. While some ecommerce platforms attempt to do so with FAQs or other static content, these solutions do not typically provide personally relevant or timely counsel to professionals in a dynamic industry.

Part of the answer we devised was the Univar Online Store's **deep integration with PestWeb.com**. PestWeb has been the de facto information source on products, pests, and other related information for more than 20 years. Professionals already visit the website to learn about industry trends and perform research on specific products.

By integrating our ecommerce platform directly into PestWeb, we enabled users to "switch modes" between research and purchase. As a result, they can access a great deal of Univar's professional expertise and make informed decisions about upcoming inventory on the spot.

As discussed previously, we also chose to make a company's **complete order history** available as an instant report for users with appropriate permissions. This allows customers to, at a glance, review the seasonality of their orders, preemptively spot potential overages/shortfalls, and create reports on which further internal discussions can be based.

Mentioned above, several ecommerce sites attempt to substitute static content for professional advice. While the Univar Online Store includes a baseline of required static content, we have chosen to keep **personal advice** a staple of the store experience. Inventory management is simply too complex to be handled by FAQs and similar content, so it was our decision to keep Univar's subject matter experts available by phone to speak with customers and help them plan for the future.

Summary – Ecommerce Value

The adoption of online ordering throughout the industries of pest management, wildlife management, public health, and related fields holds the potential for greater efficiency, and security, and profit. However, demonstrable value over traditional purchasing methods has been unevenly presented by ecommerce solution providers.

In addition to Univar's efforts to build an ecommerce platform that meets modern shopping expectations, we have designed and included features that solve problems for professionals in the midst of choosing a distribution partner. We also recognize that some customers' challenges cannot be addressed via automation, which is why we believe a human touch is integral to a successful ecommerce experience within the specialty chemicals market.

With advantages in operational control, ordering efficiency, inventory planning, and human oversight, we believe the [Univar Online Store](#) serves as an argument for change. We expect, on the whole, that forward-thinking professionals will increasingly migrate from traditional ordering systems and feature-poor solutions to those that present this kind of value.