Title: ORDERING SYSTEM AND METHOD

Abstract: An ordering method provided by an independent operator comprising the steps of: receiving quote request information from a purchaser; making at least some of the quote request information available to a number of suppliers; receiving quote information from a number of suppliers; making at least some of the quote information available to the purchaser; allowing the purchaser to generate a purchase order; and transmitting the purchase order generated by the purchaser to a supplier or making the purchase order available a supplier.
FIELD OF INVENTION

This invention relates to an ordering method and system and more particularly, but not exclusively, to an automated quotation facilitation system and method.

BACKGROUND TO THE INVENTION

It is well known for consumers to submit a request for a quotation for a product or service, at a central service provider, which then obtains quotes from different suppliers of such services on behalf of a consumer. One such example can be found at www.hippo.co.za. A consumer wishing to obtain insurance quotes submits his/her personal details to Hippo™ as well as details of the insurance the consumer wishes to obtain. Hippo™ then obtains quotations for the consumer and compiles a report setting out the details of the quotes for the consumer.

Hippo™ does not facilitate an automated process to obtain the required insurance. Nor does www.hippo.co.za provide the ability for a user/purchaser/consumer to store supplier quotations and contact information for the purpose of future re-ordering or direct integration with a purchaser’s or potential purchaser’s costing system.
Most importantly, Hippo™ does not step away and let the purchaser and insurance company deal directly with each other. Hippo™ remains a middle man and receives a commission for closing the deal.

Consumers can compare prices of goods or services at, for example, www.price-check.co.za. Again, the purchasing including, for example, the generation and submission of a purchase order is not automated at www.price-check.co.za.

These websites referred to above do not allow the supplier to quote their prospective customers directly on a quotation by quotation basis. Instead, these websites simply facilitate the ability to obtain published prices and/or order these products online.

**OBJECT OF THE INVENTION**

It is an object of this invention to provide an ordering method and system that, at least partially, alleviates some of the above-mentioned difficulties.

**SUMMARY OF INVENTION**

In accordance with this invention there is provided an ordering method provided by an independent operator comprising the steps of:

- receiving quote request information from a purchaser;
making at least some of the quote request information available to a number of suppliers;

receiving quote information from a number of suppliers;

making at least some of the quote information available to the purchaser;

allowing the purchaser to generate a purchase order; and

transmitting the purchase order generated by the purchaser to a supplier or making the purchase order available a supplier.

In accordance with a second aspect of this invention there is provided an ordering system comprising receiving means for receiving quote request information from a purchaser; management means for making at least some of the quote request information available to a supplier and for making quote information received from the supplier available to the purchaser, order generating means allowing the purchaser to generate an order and management means for transmitting the order generated by the purchaser to the supplier or access means for making the order available to a supplier.

In accordance with a third aspect of this invention there is provided an ordering system comprising a web site having input means for inputting, by a purchaser, quote request information, display means for displaying quote request information to a supplier, quote input means for inputting, by a supplier, quote information, a quote display means for displaying the quote information inputted by the supplier to the
purchaser, order generating means for allowing the purchaser to submit an order and order display means to display an order to a supplier.

The supplier is a registered supplier.

The purchaser is a registered purchaser.

The purchaser specifies quote criteria.

The quote criteria includes any one or more of the group consisting of: maximum or minimum delivery time allowed, quantity required, minimum quantity required, maximum quantity required, brand, supplier location, price range, quality, order interval or repeats.

The supplier specifies ordering criteria.

The ordering criteria includes any one or more of the group consisting of: maximum or minimum delivery time, quantity required, minimum quantity per order, maximum quantity per order, brand, purchaser location, price range, quality, order interval or repeats.
The supplier can elect to supply to a certain group of purchasers only.

A group of purchasers is a number of registered purchasers registered and authorised to purchase from the supplier.

The method or system is performed using a web site.

The quote request information is received at the web site.

The quote information is supplied from the supplier directly to the purchaser via the web site.

The purchase order is generated by the purchaser on the web site.

The purchase order is made available on the web site for access by the supplier.

A notification email is sent to a number of suppliers notifying them of the quote request information.
The email includes the quote request information.

The suppliers identify a number of categories of goods and/or services that the supplier supplies so that quote request information relating to such categories are made available to the supplier.

Supplier information is provided with quote information.

The supplier information includes any one or more of the group consisting of:

- supplier branding information,
- supplier contact information,
- supplier address information,
- supplier location information,
- trademarks,
- brand names,
- logos,
- photos,
- supplier product information.

The operator records and stores quote request information, quote information and order information.

The quote request information, quote information and order information are made available to purchasers and/or suppliers.

A supplier and/or purchaser purchase credits or to pay for an opportunity to submit quotes.
The quote request information and the quote information and purchase orders are received and transmitted or made available free of charge.

The operator provides or displays a list of outstanding orders and/or tracks the status of an order or transaction and provides status information to purchasers and/or suppliers on request, upon the happening of an event or at predetermined intervals.

The purchaser can invite specific suppliers to quote.

The specific supplier is an unregistered supplier and the purchaser provides the operator with contact details or the name of the specific supplier.

The purchaser submits quote request information for a specific product or service which is not available from existing suppliers or which has not been supplied by existing suppliers and the operator then sources a supplier who can supply the specific product or service on behalf of the purchaser.

Additional information on the product or service is requested from a purchaser when a purchaser submits quote request information relating to a product or service which
is not available from existing suppliers or which has not been supplied by existing suppliers.

A supplier provides a reason in case the supplier cannot provide quote information.

The quote request information includes information relating to required delivery times or period available for delivery.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

Embodiments of invention are described below, by way of example only, and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1: shows a schematic view of a first embodiment of a management system in which the management system is web based;

Figure 2: shows a schematic diagram of a second embodiment of a management system in which embodiment the management system is a so-called direct management system.
DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS:

With reference to the drawings, in which like features are indicted by like numerals, an ordering system is generally indicated by reference numeral 1.

The ordering system in figure 1 includes a server computer 3 of an operator at a base station which communicates through the internet to a supplier computer 4 and a purchaser computer 5. A supplier computer 4 and purchaser computer 5 can view and interact with a web site hosted by the operator on the internet.

In the embodiment of figure 2, the ordering system is not web based and is a so-called direct communication system. In this embodiment the operator's server computer 3, at its base station, communicates directly with the supplier computer 4 and purchaser computer 5. A supplier wishing to sell its goods or services may register with the operator by providing his or her personal details or company or other enterprise details such as a physical address, postal address, telephone number/s, web site address, email address/es and the like.

The names of sales persons, a contact person and other information normally required during the course of business may also be provided. The supplier also then provides a list of the categories of goods and services that he trades with. The supplier indicates only the categories of good and/or services in which he trades with and does not provide a pricelist of his good and/or services. The price for goods and/or services is provided on a quote by quote basis.
Information provided by the supplier, such as the relevant company or contact details as well as the categories of goods and/or services supplied may be amended or updated at any time by the supplier.

In addition to the above, the supplier also provides branding information such as his trade name including logos and photographs of his business and the like. This information can then be used by the operator to market the supplier to purchasers or prospective purchasers. These photographs and/or logos may also be assigned to a specific category that the supplier submits quotations for, thus facilitating the direct marketing and/or branding of products closely related to the item or service for which quotations are submitted.

A purchaser may also register at the web site or with the operator and will also provide information that would normally be required in the course of trade. The purchaser can purchase credits from the operator so that he/she can request for a quotation for goods and/or services with the operator. The purchaser may also be able to request quotations free of charge.

It is envisaged that the web site and the services offered by the operator would be offered free of charge by the operator to suppliers and purchasers and that here would be no need for suppliers or purchasers to buy credits.

If not provided free of charge, the supplier also purchases credits from the operator so that he/she can submit quotes when requested to do so by the operator or when such request are submitted to the web site.

A purchaser wishing to purchase goods or services submits a request (referred to as quote request information) at the web site to obtain quotes for a specific product or
service. The purchaser or the operator then indicates in which category the required product or service would fall.

The information provided by the purchaser is selected from menus, such as drop-down menus, on the web site maintained by the operator or on software directly available from the operator and installed on or accessible by the purchasers' computer. If a generic description on such a menu is not available or is not specific enough to the liking of the purchaser, the purchaser has the option to submit alternative information, thus providing more detailed information of the products or services required. If there are no suppliers registered with the operator that supply the specific goods or services that the purchaser wishes to purchase, the operator will source those goods or services on behalf of the purchaser and ask a supplier of those good and or services to register at the web site and to submit a quote.

The operator now submits a request for a quote for the goods or services required by the purchaser, to suppliers that operate in the category(s) for which a quotation request was transmitted. Alternatively, the quote request information is made available on the web site for suppliers to access. A notification such as an email notification may or may not be sent to suppliers to alert them of a quote request in their category. The operator would normally submit or make available this request for a quote to registered suppliers (members). The operator may alternatively or in addition choose to request an unregistered (non-member) supplier to provide a quote and in the process thus advertising the operators' services without such advertisement being regarded as unwarranted or as spam. This may especially be the case as explained above where a specific product or service is not available from existing registered suppliers. In the case where a non-member supplier is approached to provide a quote such supplier may not pay for providing such a quote.
The operator may choose to allow such a supplier to submit an initial limited number of quotes free of charge where after the supplier would be required to pay for the submission of quotes.

The operator now receives quotes from a number of member and/or non-member suppliers and generates a report for the purchaser. Alternatively, the suppliers access the web site and submit quotes which are then made available or forwarded to the purchaser.

The report is transmitted or made available to the purchaser and the purchaser now selects one or more of the quotes and then uses software tools provided by the operator to automate the generation and submission of a purchase order to a supplier. The purchase order is generated or filled out by the purchaser and sent or made available directly to the supplier. Apart from facilitating the generation of a purchase order and ensuring that the purchase order is made available to the supplier, the operator does not interfere in this process. It is envisaged that the operator would not earn a commission or any monetary reward as a result of a purchase order whether such purchase order is completed or not. However, in some embodiments this might happen.

The operator earns an income from credits bought by suppliers and purchasers to be allowed to use the system. In yet another embodiment, the services offered by the operator is offered free of charge to suppliers and purchasers. The operator would then earn an income from third party advertising on the web site or from other sources.

In this process of communicating quotes to the purchaser and possibly copying or providing the purchaser with purchase orders, the details of the various suppliers or
the details of the suppliers with successful quotes may be transmitted and disclosed and/or displayed to the purchaser. In this way, the suppliers are marketed to the various purchasers.

As stated above, suppliers of products and/or services do not submit pricelists and/or inventory. Suppliers indicate a category or categories of goods and/or services that they supply and the receive quotation requests from purchasers. The advantage of this is that suppliers are not bound by previously submitted pricelists. They can quote a real time price for goods and/or services as they receive quote requests. This will assist suppliers who are exposed to exchange control fluctuations, material cost fluctuations and other inset cost fluctuations. Prices quoted are stored so that a supplier can access a record of previous quotations to each buyer. This information can also be used for re-ordering. Previous quotes and order are stored for re-use and re-ordering by the purchaser. If a quote has expired, orders can no longer be placed in respect of such quote.

The supplier can also access information relating to feedback from a buyer on the supplier’s performance or the product or service supplied.

The operator can also provide enquiry and sales statistics relating to goods and services sold, geographic locations, prices and the like.

The supplier can filter quotation requests based on buyer geographic location, brands supplied, order quantities, delivery response periods and the like.

It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that there are various ways in facilitating the payment. For example, a deposit may be required. Alternatively, the operator may assume the risk on behalf of some purchasers and pay the deposit
itself. Delivery of goods and services could be required in full before any payment occurs. Well known methods of trusted 3rd party representation and facilitation may be employed to facilitate these types of transactions.

When a purchaser enters a quotation request on the web site, he can invite suppliers that are not registered members of the system as yet, to quote. The operator would then contact these suppliers and invite them to join and to provide a quote.

When a purchaser inputs a quote request for a specific product, and the product is not supplied by any of the suppliers and not available on the system, the purchaser is asked for some more information on the product. The operator would then source that product by contacting suppliers (who are probably not registered with the system) to add the product and/or supplier to the system.

If a supplier cannot quote, he can provide a reason for not being able to quote. The reason could be stored and could be made available to the purchaser.

Suppliers and/or purchasers could be blacklisted for abuse of the system.

Once a purchaser receives a quote from suppliers, the purchaser could in future deal directly with the supplier via normal channels and no longer has to use the system. However, continued use of the system would save time as previous orders are saved and could easily be submitted. Furthermore, a quote request submitted through the system every time an order is required would ensure that the purchaser receives the best quotes for a product or service. Obtaining quotes and ordering becomes easier and quicker so that, in many cases, employees employed as buyers might no longer be required.
It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the system is operated on a web site. "Display means" are referred to as pages or parts of pages of the web site where notifications such as quote request information, quote information and/or purchase orders as displayed to purchasers or suppliers as the case may be. "Input means" are web pages of the web site where information can be inputted by purchasers or suppliers as is known in the art. "Order generating means" are likewise pages or parts of pages on the web site where an order can be created or submitted. Suppliers are then alerted to the order by posting the order in a notification section on a web page when the supplier logs on to the web site. Quote information is likewise posted, as is quote request information.

The method described above provides a convenient alternative to purchasers and suppliers alike. A purchaser has not much more to do than submit a request for a quote and thereafter choose from amongst the number of quotes provided. From there on the transaction may be automated in full without the purchaser having to be part thereof, thereby improving the purchaser's efficiencies from a time management perspective. Additionally, the purchaser need not possess any knowledge of which suppliers may be able to provide the products or services for which he is requesting a quotation. The invention thus automatically facilitates interaction with a broader range of appropriate suppliers.

The method described above would save time in that a purchaser submits a request for a quote at the web site and not directly to various suppliers. Purchasers then choose a quote and the submission of a purchase order on the web site is a very simple process.
The supplier also has marketing exposure to the purchasing members of the operator. From the supplier's side, the transaction is also automated and facilitated by the operator.

Finally, it would be appreciated by those skilled in the art that various embodiments of the invention are possible without the departing from the scope of the invention.
Claims

1. An ordering method provided by an independent operator comprising the steps of:
   receiving quote request information from a purchaser;
   making at least some of the quote request information available to a number of suppliers;
   receiving quote information from a number of suppliers;
   making at least some of the quote information available to the purchaser;
   allowing the purchaser to generate a purchase order; and
   transmitting the purchase order generated by the purchaser to a supplier or making the purchase order available to a supplier.

2. An ordering system comprising receiving means for receiving quote request information from a purchaser; management means for making at least some of the quote request information available to a supplier and for making quote information received from the supplier available to the purchaser, order generating means allowing the purchaser to generate an order and management means for transmitting the order generated by the purchaser to the supplier or access means for making the order available to a supplier.

3. An ordering system comprising a web site having input means for inputting, by a purchaser, quote request information, display means for displaying quote request information to a supplier, quote input means for inputting, by a supplier, quote information, a quote display means for displaying the quote
information inputted by the supplier to the purchaser, order generating means
for allowing the purchaser to submit an order and order display means to
display an order to a supplier.

4. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims
in which the supplier is a registered supplier.

5. An ordering method or system claimed in any one of the preceding claims in
which the purchaser is a registered purchaser.

6. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims
in which the purchaser specifies quote criteria.

7. An ordering method or system as claimed in claim 6 in which the quote criteria
includes any one or more of the group consisting of: maximum or minimum
delivery time allowed, quantity required, minimum quantity required, maximum
quantity required, brand, supplier location, price range, quality, order interval
or repeats.

8. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims
in which the supplier specifies ordering criteria.

9. An ordering method or system as claimed in claim 8 in which the ordering
criteria includes any one or more of the group consisting of: maximum or
minimum delivery time, quantity required, minimum quantity per order,
maximum quantity per order, brand, purchaser location, price range, quality,
order interval or repeats.
10. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the supplier can elect to supply to a certain group of purchasers only.

11. An ordering method or system as claimed in claim 10 in which a group of purchasers is a number of registered purchasers registered and authorised to purchase from the supplier.

12. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the method and system is performed using a web site.

13. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the quote request information is received at a web site.

14. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the quote information is supplied from the supplier directly to the purchaser via a web site.

15. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the purchase order is generated by the purchaser on the web site.

16. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the purchase order is made available on the web site for access by the supplier.

17. An ordering system or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which a notification email is sent to a number of suppliers notifying them of the quote request information.
18. An ordering method or system as claimed in claim 17 in which the email includes the quote request information.

19. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the supplier identifies a number of categories of goods and/or services that the supplier supplies so that quote request information relating to such categories are made available to the supplier.

20. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which supplier information is provided with quote information.

21. An ordering method or system as claimed in claim 20 in which the supplier information includes any one or more of the group consisting of: supplier branding information, supplier contact information, supplier address information, supplier location information, trademarks, brand names, logos, photos, supplier product information.

22. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the operator records and stores quote request information, quote information and order information.

23. An ordering method or system as claimed in claim 22 in which the quote request information, quote information and order information are made available to purchasers and/or suppliers.
24. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which a supplier and/or purchaser purchase credits or to pay for an opportunity to submit quotes.

25. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 23 in which the quote request information and the quote information and purchase orders are received and transmitted or made available free of charge.

26. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the operator provides or displays a list of outstanding orders and/or tracks the status of an order or transaction and provides status information to purchasers and/or suppliers on request, upon the happening of an event or at predetermined intervals.

27. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the purchaser can invite specific suppliers to quote.

28. An ordering method or system as claimed in claim 27 in which the specific supplier is an unregistered supplier and the purchaser provides the operator with contact details or the name of the specific supplier.

29. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the purchaser submits quote request information for a specific product or service which is not available from existing suppliers or which has not been supplied by existing suppliers and the operator then sources a supplier who can supply the specific product or service on behalf of the purchaser.
30. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which additional information on the product or service is requested from a purchaser when a purchaser submits quote request information relating to a product or service which is not available from existing suppliers or which has not been supplied by existing suppliers.

31. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which a supplier provides a reason in case the supplier cannot provide quote information.

32. An ordering method or system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the quote request information includes information relating to required delivery times or period available for delivery.
### INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

**International application No**

PCT/IB2013/06068Q

### A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

**INV. G06Q30/06**

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

### B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

G06Q

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data

### C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

X See patent family annex.

### Date of the actual completion of the international search

1 April 2014

### Date of mailing of the international search report

08/04/2014

Name and mailing address of the ISA/

European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2

NL-2280 HV Rijswijk

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Authorized officer

Sigolo, Alessandro
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