

eSteel

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It's time for the way we buy steel to catch up with the way we buy everything else.

WE LIVE IN A WORLD of amazing technology that we often take for granted.

We buy books, gifts, plane tickets and hotel rooms with the click of a button. We manage our finances online with secure banking websites and even deposit checks by snapping a photo with our smartphones.

Yet almost 100% of structural steel is still ordered using a fax or by emailing documents such as PDFs or Excel spreadsheets. The process is manual, involves unnecessary steps and is prone to errors. There is no standard way of sharing or exchanging data about a buyer's material needs and a supplier's availability. Every RFQ and purchase order needs to be reentered into the receiver's system—at both ends of the transaction. We're well into 2014. It doesn't need to be this way anymore.

steelXML

AISC's recently launched steelXML initiative is the first step in bringing true e-commerce to the structural steel industry. The project aims to provide a standard file format that every MIS, modeling and material management software package (at buyer or supplier ends) can easily implement to streamline the complete process of material procurement and management. In short, steelXML will improve the way steel is quoted, purchased, delivered and managed, eliminating errors and saving time along the way.

Manual reentry of data wastes time, costs money and adds no value to the process. With steelXML, you will create a report that can be imported as opposed to a PDF or

fax whose data has to be manually typed in. The steelXML schema includes all information pertinent to the steel procurement process, from initial inquiry through to delivery. Software vendors and steel buyers and suppliers can adopt all or parts of the schema as they see fit. As the language behind this initiative—eXtensible Markup Language (XML)—is such a common format, they can even choose to extend its capabilities if needed.

Here's how it works: The fabricator's material and management software will have a new option to export information to a file that can be emailed to their supplier. The supplier can import the information directly to their software and databases and can then send a response using the same process. This eliminates the need to create PDFs or other file types, the use of proprietary (non-standard) file types, time spent manually entering and reentering information and errors.

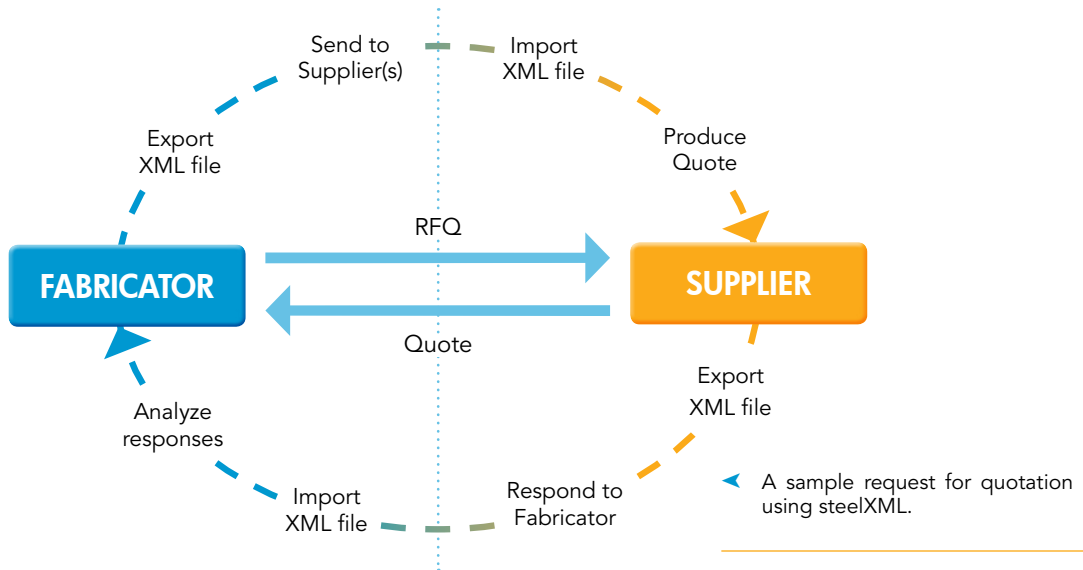
Strong Support

Here's a list of identified, implementable workflows that steelXML supports:

- Availability inquiry
- Request for quote (RFQ)
- Purchase order (PO)
- Order status
- Advanced shipping notice (ASN)
- Material test reports (MTR)
- Bill of lading (BOL)
- Sustainability
- Invoice
- Payment



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We have the technology!

In a world where we self-procure everything from plane tickets to cars, this is a natural step. Other industries are starting to do this and the steel industry cannot fall behind; rather it must maintain its leadership position. While many suppliers are developing customer portals and electronic B2B commerce, there is no standard that supports them all. As such, this can actually result in decreasing the efficiency of our industry as every connection to every supplier is different in terms of format and methodology. Since fabricators don't buy all their steel from one supplier, a standard is a necessity. steelXML is that standard.

The technology exists to increase our industry's efficiency and move toward true B2B e-commerce. Doing so will assure the competitiveness of our industry and help not only maintain but also increase steel's market share. ■

To learn more about steelXML, visit www.aisc.org/bimsteel. Going to NASCC? Be sure to attend Session T1, "BIMsteel: AISC's Interoperability Initiatives for the Structural Steel Industry." In addition, NASCC exhibitors involved in the steelXML initiative will have signs at their booths indicating their participation.