

# How Online Quoting Compressed Time for Plastic Injection Molding

*by Denny Scher*

As recently as a couple of years ago, it took engineers days or even weeks to obtain a quote for a custom plastic injection molding project. Today, the quotation processing time has been compressed to just a matter of hours. Through the Internet and some very complex, innovative online quotation systems, the automation of the quotation process has revolutionized the plastic injection molding industry.

## **The Need For Speed**

Products today have an increasingly shorter lifespan. Think about how quickly new models of cell phones hit the market, in all their variations, colors, and the multitude of customizable accessories for them. We've never had so many choices to personalize our things, and the constantly-changing product mix means manufacturers are required to design, collaborate and source at ludicrous speed.

Since time to market can greatly impact your competitive advantage, manufacturers and suppliers are leveraging the immediacy of the Internet to connect and collaborate. Ten years ago, only about 10% of businesses used online tools for sourcing manufacturing services. Today, fully 90% do!

There has been a revolutionary change in the way the manufacturing industry does business. Technology has given buyers all sorts of online tools that increase their efficiency in finding suppliers, securely submitting RFQs and receiving quotes online.

## **Plastics, In Particular**

Just take a look around and you'll see that plastic is everywhere. Plastic parts are used in every industry from automotive to aerospace, and the shrinkage of the manufacturing time window has particularly affected the plastics industry. Due to the increased demand for high-specification products with short turnaround times, the need for prototype and rapid-production plastic parts is higher than ever.

The hot "new" production method in plastics is Additive Manufacturing (AM), commonly referred to as 3D Printing. Although not actually new, it seems to be all we hear about these days. While the method does certainly have advantages for certain applications, it's not the end-all, be-all plastics manufacturing method the buzz would have you believe.

There is certainly still plenty of room for good old, tried-and-true, plastic injection molding – it's here to stay. Plastic injection molding is one of the most basic, reliable methods for manufacturing plastic parts. The details of various plastic manufacturing methods won't be discussed here, but regardless of the method, the process starts with a CAD drawing from an engineer.

## **The Connected Engineer**

So where are these engineers, and what's their modus operandi? The answer is, they are online, and they are using a variety of digital resources to perform work-related tasks more effectively and efficiently than

ever. They are using the Internet to find product availability information, equipment, services and suppliers. Most importantly, they are using digital resources to request quotes from suppliers. In fact, according to the IHS Engineering360 research report, 2015 Digital Media Use in the Industrial Sector, 75% of technical professionals use supplier websites for information, and 62% use the Internet to request a price quote.

In the not-too-distant past, the quotation process had multiple steps, had to be touched by multiple people, and would typically take multiple days. A customer/engineer would send off an email to the supplier with an attached CAD drawing and the specifications for the part needed.

There might be some additional back-and-forth emails or phone calls to clarify the specifications, and then the request might get forwarded to another person who actually worked up the quote. The quote might come back in the form of a spreadsheet, which then had to be converted to a quote form and finally delivered to the customer.



Today, however, technology and the advancement of complex, sophisticated online quotation systems have compressed the quote processing time from days to minutes.

## **Online Quotation Systems**

A handful of the largest custom plastic injection molding companies have developed new, interactive systems with very large backend databases that can automatically provide quotations, in many cases requiring little to no human intervention.

[ICOMold](#), headquartered in Holland, Ohio is one such company. In 2014, ICOMold released its online quotation system that enables the customer to upload a CAD file to the system, use dropdown menus to choose all the specifications like quantity of parts, plastic material, color and finish. Multiple injection mold projects can even be included in the same RFQ. When all the options have been selected, a click on the Submit button sends the information to a huge database.

The request is then processed against a large amount of data and cost information in the system to return the quote, automatically, to the customer. And today, the customer is not necessarily always the engineering type. Sparked by encouragement from the likes of Shark Tank and crowdfunding, entrepreneurs with their ideas to build a better mousetrap are also using the online quotation system to source their custom plastic products.

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## **And the Online Interaction Continues**

One unique aspect of the ICOMold online quotation system, in particular, is that it serves a dual purpose. Not only does it serve as an interactive quotation tool, but it also functions as a project management system once the project is launched.

The customer can track his project status through the system, and communicate with the sales engineers and project managers on a discussion board. The all-in-one system eliminates communication delays that can happen with emails and phone calls. It also allows users to upload important files and documents, keeping all the project information in one place that's easily accessible by all parties.

Online quotation systems have revolutionized the process for getting a quote for custom plastic injection molding projects by shrink-

ing the timeframe for the process. And, the plastic parts themselves are getting produced faster. It's hard to imagine how technology could ever make this process any faster. Will there come a day when we simply envision a plastic part and it suddenly appears? It sure seems like we're almost there.

*About the author: Denny Scher is the Marketing Manager for ICOMold, a custom plastic injection molding company based in Holland (Toledo), Ohio. ICOMold manufactures plastic injection molds, plastic parts, and CNC machined prototypes for a variety of industries. Its online quotation system provides fast, interactive quotes and also serves as a project management platform. For more information, visit [www.ICOMold.com](http://www.ICOMold.com).*