Faster Procurement with APIs

Estimated reading time: 2 minutes

MOUSER ELECTRONICS

Purchasers of electronic components are searching high and low for new, better, and faster ways to find parts. The age-old practice of having multiple distributor websites open, plus a few aggregators, plus a manufacturer page or two—frantically cutting and pasting part number after part number hoping for a hit—has worn thin. Spreadsheets can help, but by the time these spreadsheets are returned, they are often quickly updated. With all the frenzy of playing a Vegas slot machine, buyers everywhere are cutting and pasting and endlessly typing in part number after part number, hoping to see the stars align. If they do hit the jackpot, the race is on to get a purchase order created, approved, and submitted before that ever-elusive stock is gobbled up.

Any purchasing pro has played this game too many times, and most figure there must be a better and easier way to quickly find (and maybe even buy) components. They long for the days when the "search" list is easier to fill, and they can spend more time working on more fulfilling and thought-provoking day-to-day challenges. They long to spend their days with higher-level negotiations and strategy, the hours of cutting and pasting a distant memory.

Automation is slowly helping to make that dream a reality for some of the more progressive purchasing groups. Many have adopted APIs (Application Program Interfaces) to help take some of the endless clicking off their plate.

Although APIs sound complicated, they are really quite common. They are so common that most folks may have used one or two already today. If you have ever scrolled through your favorite social media outlet, APIs were working to gather information about cats or golf or bicycling (or whatever is most relevant to you) to show you on your feed. Your profile on many social media sites represents a unique chunk of data (that can be called via API) that contains details about your interests.

If you like cats, an API could call for cat images—golf, same thing. Cats playing golf? Sure, that information is there somewhere! These inquiries, or "calls," is the key trick for an API, and the "calling" can be done millions of times, taking only nanoseconds to request information.

Now, substitute an interest in cats for an interest in 25 pieces of Micron MTFDKBA1T0TFH-1BC15ABYY.

That part number and quantity is the chunk of data. Your API-enabled system sends a call for this data to Mouser Electronics, Inc. Mouser safely sends back to your system the information that they have 173 in stock and the current pricing. The call and response can be set up to happen manually or at timed intervals. Imagine if, every time you accessed your component "search" information, right next to that information was fresh details from your favorite distributor(s) about how they could meet your needs.
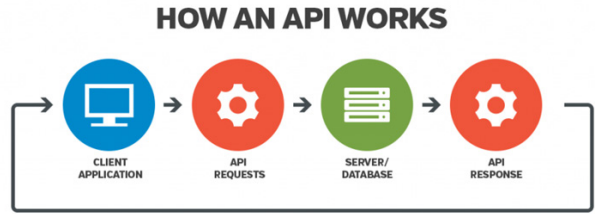

Figure 1: *How an API works. (Source: welldoneby.com)*

Some purchasing groups are even taking it to the next level. They have moved on from just using a quote API to adding a "Buy" API to the mix. These customers pre-program their systems to approve an immediate "Buy" and send a PO if certain parameters are met. If the price is right and the stock or lead time matches, the computer immediately submits a PO and secures the stock.

Many distributors today have "Order Automation" info pages on their websites. The big ones have spent a good amount of time and energy expanding their API capacity and have teams ready to help even the most uninformed get started.

Spend a minute or two scrolling around. Check to see if your MRP has API capability. If it does, sign up to get rolling!