

# TECHTOOLS

TECHNOLOGY FOR THE MODERN HOME BUILDER ■ EDITED BY STEVE ZURIER

## Supply Chain Progress

*Beazer, GE, and Hyphen Solutions find a better way to process orders.*

**D**URING THE RISE OF THE INTERNET ERA IN the late 1990s, while the automotive, aerospace, and most other industries moved forward with B2B e-commerce, BuildNet, the building industry's e-commerce play, failed miserably. The result was that home building lagged far behind most other industries in this area—but that's beginning to change.

A partnership between Beazer Homes, GE's appliance business, and software vendor Hyphen Solutions has produced a system in which Beazer's GE appliance orders get processed through Hyphen's BuildPro and SupplyPro interfaces and SupplyPro Connect servers. Think of SupplyPro Connect as a messaging system that takes converted XML or spreadsheet documents and feeds the orders into GE's back-office system.

Under the old system, Beazer used to phone and

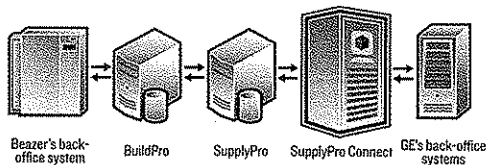
fax orders to GE, and in turn, GE would have to rekey the order information into its back-office system. Now, orders are processed in seconds.

Tony Callahan, Beazer's senior vice president of national purchasing, planning, and design, says the home builder started by rolling out the new order processing system at its New Jersey division.

Callahan says that while Beazer has been working with GE and Hyphen since April 2005, builders looking to deploy the system could be up and running in about three to six months. The major work for builders is that GE requires home builders to enter GE SKU numbers. There is no fee for builders to implement the system. The major cost is the time it takes builders to get their system ready to communicate with GE.

### BEAZER AND GE CONNECT

Here's an overview of how Beazer and GE process orders using SupplyPro Connect from Hyphen Solutions:



SOURCE: HYPHEN SOLUTIONS

## Sales Tool

**C**AD software company Chief Architect reports that builders and designers are using the company's software as a sales tool to help sell upgrades in kitchens and other parts of the house. Adam Gibson, who runs a design company that works with many builders in the Indianapolis area, says home builders can deliver the "wow factor" by showing the 3-D renderings. "Buyers don't always know what a 3-D image [of the upgrade] will look like, and they really don't expect it," he says.

## Sage Delivers

**S**age Software plans to ship Estimating for Master Builder sometime next month. The goal is to offer the same type of detailed estimating features Sage packs into Timberline Office, but in a package that's geared to smaller businesses and that integrates well with Master Builder. While Master Builder always had an estimating feature, it was primarily designed for general contractors who subcontract out most of the work and have fairly simple, line-by-line estimating needs. The new product is perfect for custom builders who might have a framing or concrete crew and need to do a materials take-off. The estimating software will start at \$1,500.

**DO YOU HAVE A TECH STORY?**

E-MAIL STEVE ZURIER AT: [szurier@hanleywood.com](mailto:szurier@hanleywood.com)

## Public Service

*A Milwaukee HBA is using a Web-based geographic information system to support local builders.*

**T**HE LOCAL HBA IS ONE of the first phone calls a home buyer will make when shopping for a home in a new community. About two years ago, when the market was hot, the Metropolitan Builders Association of Greater Milwaukee received a

flood of calls and came up with the idea of redirecting inquiries by posting new-home information and supporting maps on a public Web site.

Through a partnership with National Survey & Engineering of Brookfield, Wis., the builder trade group developed the site, which today lists information on 1,800 new homes from 193 companies.

"We used to issue a print map of all our projects, but the map became outdated quickly," says Matt Moroney, executive director of the Milwaukee builder group. "Now, our members update the site at minimum every 30 days, and we've created a one-stop shop on the Web for potential home buyers," he says.

To access the new-home information, home shoppers can

log on to [www.mbaonline.org](http://www.mbaonline.org) and click on "Find a Member" in the upper right-hand corner of the site page. From there, visitors can search by lots, new homes and condos, open model homes and condos, builders, remodelers, developers, and construction services and materials.

Searches for new homes are supported by maps that offer general driving directions and highlight the locations of new homes, lots, and open model homes. For more specific driving instructions, home shoppers need to call the builder.

"Our goal is to drive the site traffic to the members," says David Haines of National Survey & Engineering, which worked closely with the Milwaukee builder group on the project. **B**