As the 21st century looms just beyond the horizon, a fundamental shift is taking place in the world of human communication. In fact, some would say this transformation is as revolutionary as the impact wrought by Gutenberg’s printing press some 600 years ago.

What is the agent of this change? Electronic communication, that vast array of global computers and telecommunications links, enabling the ultimate communications tool—the Internet. According to Nicholas Negroponte, author of Being Digital, we are being “released from the limitation of geographic proximity” as a basis for our activities, particularly our business activities. In the world of the future, Negroponte writes, time zones will play a greater role than political boundaries, and work on some projects will literally “move around the world from east to west on a 24-hour cycle, from person to person.” This metamorphosis is enabled by electronic communication, and now, the Internet. No-where does electronic communication bode more important than in the global business arena. Today globalization is an inescapable fact of economic life. It is business that knits our world together and that drives opportunities for growth; thus, it is business-to-business electronic commerce that is the natural heir to this first generation of electronic communication.

Interestingly, only a few years ago many believed that the first commercial applications of Internet technology, or electronic commerce, would be in business-to-consumer marketing. For a variety of reasons that development has been delayed and indeed, it is clear that at least initially business-to-business applications will most likely carry electronic commerce beyond its current evolution.

The success of this new breed is based on its ability to meet the exploding demands of a global customer base. At AMP Incorporated, the world’s leading supplier of electrical and electronic connectors and interconnection systems, exceptional customer service has provided the backdrop against which the company has played out its success as global electronics leader for the last half century. With operations in forty-five countries in every corner of the world, serving customers diverse in language, culture, standards, regulations, product, industry, and market segment has led AMP to tap every capability at its disposal, including the powerful advantages posed by electronic communication.

What are those customer requirements? For AMP, with tens of thousands of products serving customers in every major market from the Japanese automotive industry to Scandinavian cellular phone manufacturers to American computer makers, it’s a challenge of massive proportions. But, regardless of individual needs, all customers share the same desire. Aside from their requirements for products of the highest quality and value, customers seek suppliers with whom it is easy to do business. Herein