# Catalog Buying: procurement via electronic supplier catalogues

Catalog Buying refers to the procurement of goods and services via electronic supplier catalogues from which buyers or requisitioners select and order items directly. The approach standardises recurring requirements, reduces processing effort and creates price transparency in relation to framework agreements. For industrial procurement organisations, Catalog Buying is a key instrument of operational purchasing optimisation, particularly in the C-parts area.

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### Key facts at a glance

01 Catalog Buying is the direct ordering from approved supplier catalogues, usually based on framework agreements.

02 Typically, the approach is suitable for standard parts, consumables and repeat requirements with low complexity.

03 In practice, Catalog Buying often achieves significant savings in process costs, as approval and ordering steps are automated.

04 Prerequisites are quality-assured catalogue data, frequently in accordance with standards such as ECLASS, as well as clearly defined responsibilities.

05 Key metrics are catalogue coverage rate, order cycle time and price adherence compared with the framework agreement.

## Definition: Catalog Buying

Catalog Buying (also known as catalogue ordering or catalogue buying) is a form of accelerated procurement in which requisitioners select items from an electronic supplier catalogue and order them directly without an individual enquiry. The catalogue is typically based on a framework agreement or a direct award with negotiated terms.

### Distinction from the classic enquiry process

Unlike a tendering process with enquiry, offer comparison and award record, Catalog Buying eliminates individual price negotiation per requirement. The terms have already been agreed in advance; the order is in effect a call-off. This shortens the procurement cycle from often days to hours or minutes. However, catalogues do not replace strategic supplier selection – they presuppose it.

- No re-tendering per requirement, call-off from the framework agreement
- Reduced approval effort with predefined budgets
- Traceability via the award file in individual cases

### Positioning within the procurement strategy

Catalog Buying is an instrument of transactional procurement and closely linked to requirements determination. It consolidates scattered orders from many requisitioners onto a few suppliers, thereby increasing order volume per supplier relationship. This creates relevant purchasing leverage on prices and terms. Classically, the approach is combined with measures such as consignment warehousing or direct delivery.

## Methods and approach in Catalog Buying

Building a functioning catalogue procurement process follows a multi-stage approach: requirement classification, supplier and contract design, catalogue build-up and operations management. The cleaner the preparation, the higher the acceptance in day-to-day business.

### Requirement classification and catalogue selection

First, material groups with high order frequency and a standardised degree of specification are identified, such as tools, operating equipment, fasteners or standard electronics. For these areas, it is examined whether a supplier catalogue or a multi-supplier catalogue is suitable. Product classification systems such as ECLASS ensure that items are clearly described and searchable. Ambiguous or project-related requirements do not belong in the catalogue.

- High order frequency, low specification depth
- ECLASS or comparable classification for data quality
- Separation of catalogue and project items

### Contractual foundations and catalogue structure

Framework agreements govern prices, terms, delivery conditions such as DDP and transport costs, minimum order quantities and price adherence clauses. Anyone planning longer catalogue terms should consider a price escalation clause to avoid having to renegotiate in the event of raw material or index changes. The catalogue itself contains, alongside prices, availability data, technical documentation and, where necessary, guidance on avoiding missing parts.

### Integration into procurement systems

In practice, catalogues are integrated into the ERP or e-procurement system via punchout interfaces, OCI handovers or as local data stocks. It is essential that the shopping basket is converted directly into an order and that processes such as budget checks, account assignment and approval run automatically. For cross-border procurement, documents such as the commercial invoice should be derivable from the catalogue data.

- Punchout or local catalogue data depending on order volume
- Automatic budget and account checks
- Customs-relevant data for export processing

## Key KPIs and success factors

The success of Catalog Buying can be steered using a few clearly measurable metrics. These show whether the catalogue strategy is actually extracting value from procurement processes and where there is untapped purchasing optimisation potential.

### Metrics for penetration and efficiency

The catalogue coverage rate indicates what share of order volume (often measured by items or value) is processed via catalogues. In practice, values above 60–70 % for C-parts are considered a good level. In addition, order cycle time and the share of automated orders without manual intervention are key indicators.

- Catalogue coverage rate measured by order items
- Cycle time from requirement notification to order confirmation
- Rate of touchless orders

### Price and quality metrics

Price adherence checks whether invoiced prices correspond exactly to the catalogue or framework agreement; deviations are clarified via a price deviation workflow. In addition, delivery reliability of the catalogue supplier, missing-part rate and material master data maintenance (e.g. share of duplicate or outdated catalogue items) should be monitored.

## Risks and controls in Catalog Buying

Catalogue procurement simplifies processes but shifts control points into catalogue maintenance and system governance. Without clear rules, there is a risk of maverick orders outside the catalogue, price drift and a lack of traceability.

### Typical risks

Common problems are outdated prices or availability data in the catalogue, circumvention of the catalogue by requisitioners ("shadow procurement"), inadequate approval rules for high amounts, and

dependence on individual suppliers. Legal aspects such as compliance, sanctions lists and checks for dual-use goods must also not be overlooked in automated orders.

- Price drift with insufficient catalogue maintenance
- Circumvention via direct orders
- Export and sanctions screening in automated processes

### Controls and governance

Effective controls include regular reconciliation of the catalogue against the framework agreement, approval thresholds, and a documented procurement authorisation matrix that defines who may order which items within which value range. Key award decisions – such as the selection of the catalogue supplier – should be documented with an award record and negotiation log. For critical suppliers, due diligence is part of ongoing monitoring.

- Annual catalogue–agreement reconciliation
- Approval thresholds and roles via the procurement authorisation matrix
- Documentation of supplier selection in the award file

## Current developments in Catalog Buying

Catalogue procurement is evolving from static price lists to dynamic, data-driven procurement channels. Artificial intelligence, marketplace integrations and standardised data models are changing the role of the buyer.

### Automation and AI-supported catalogue maintenance

Classification and matching tools automatically identify which internal material number matches which catalogue item and suggest complementary assortments. This significantly reduces maintenance effort and improves requirements determination because requisitioners find precisely fitting alternatives. AI also supports the creation of enquiries for those items that cannot be catalogued.

### Multi-supplier catalogues and marketplaces

Increasingly, multiple suppliers are being merged into a single catalogue or via B2B marketplaces. Buyers compare price, delivery time and availability transparently – comparable with a broadly documented award record at item level. Supplementary concepts such as consignment warehousing or supplier-managed supply planning integrate catalogue procurement more closely into the material supply of manufacturing.

- Transparent comparison at item level
- Connection with missing-part management and tool deposits for tool catalogues
- Closer coupling with logistics and inventory processes

## Typical metrics

| Metric | Typical value |
|---|---|
| **Catalogue coverage rate** | > 60–70 % for C-parts<br>*Share of order volume processed via catalogues* |
| **Order cycle time** | < 1 working day<br>*From requirement notification to order confirmation in the catalogue process* |
| **Price adherence / catalogue loyalty** | > 98 %<br>*Share of line items without price deviation from the framework agreement* |
| **Touchless rate** | > 80 %<br>*Share of automated orders without manual intervention* |

## Practical example

A medium-sized mechanical engineering company with around 500 employees previously sourced tools and lubricants via individual enquiries to several distributors; in practice, processing effort per order was often more than one hour. Introducing a catalogue supplier with a framework agreement and punchout integration significantly streamlined the process.

- Consolidation of four distributors into one catalogue supplier with negotiated framework terms
- Punchout catalogue with ECLASS classification and automated budget check up to an approval threshold of EUR 1,000
- Monthly price reconciliation between catalogue and framework agreement via a defined price deviation workflow
- Expansion to include a consignment warehouse for ramp-up tools to safeguard the supply of missing parts

## Conclusion

Catalog Buying shifts effort away from individual orders and into one-off preparation: cleanly negotiated framework agreements, quality-assured catalogue data and clear approval rules. The reward is shorter cycle times, lower process costs and greater price transparency. The prerequisite is active governance – without regular catalogue maintenance and controls, catalogues quickly lose their binding force. For industrial procurement organisations, the approach is therefore less an IT project than a strategic decision about division of labour and supplier structure. Those who consistently run Catalog Buying with classification standards such as ECLASS and clear KPIs create capacity for value-adding tasks such as negotiation and supplier development.

## Frequently asked questions

### ? What does Catalog Buying mean?

Catalog Buying refers to procurement via electronic supplier catalogues from which line items are ordered directly, without the need to raise an enquiry for each individual requirement. It is typically based on a framework agreement with negotiated prices and terms. This approach reduces processing effort and increases price transparency.

### ? Which products are suitable for Catalog Buying?

Typically, Catalog Buying is suitable for standardised products with a high order frequency and low specification depth. This includes tools, consumables, fasteners, standard electronics and MRO items. Project-related or customer-specific services, by contrast, should be procured via enquiry processes.

### ? What are the advantages of Catalog Buying compared with the classic enquiry process?

The main advantage is speed: orders are created in minutes rather than days, as enquiry, offer comparison and award are eliminated. Added to this are lower process costs, fixed prices and consolidated volumes that provide purchasing leverage. In addition, the error rate decreases thanks to standardised catalogue data.

### ? What role does ECLASS play in Catalog Buying?

ECLASS is a cross-industry standard for the classification and description of products. It ensures that catalogue items are clearly described, searchable and can be reconciled with internal material numbers. Without such classification standards, data quality suffers and the mapping of requirements to catalogue items becomes error-prone.

### ? How is Catalog Buying successfully introduced?

A successful implementation involves clear requirement classification, the selection of suitable suppliers under a framework agreement, and technical integration via punchout or catalogue import. Crucial factors are training for requisitioners, documented approval rules via a procurement authorisation matrix, and regular reconciliations between the catalogue and the agreement.

### ? What are the risks of Catalog Buying?

Typical risks include outdated prices and availability data in the catalogue, circumvention through orders placed outside the catalogue, and inadequate controls for high order values. Compliance issues such as sanctions lists or dual-use goods must also be checked in automated processes. Regular catalogue reconciliations and defined approval thresholds significantly reduce these risks.

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