

# Alice.com grasps the woes of buying toilet paper

July 1 2009, By RACHEL METZ , AP Technology Writer

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(AP) -- If shopping for household essentials like toilet paper and soap isn't your favorite activity, a new Web site might eliminate the task - while saving you cash.

The recently launched Alice.com lets people buy all manner of necessities from different manufacturers. There are about 6,000 items to choose from so far. The site keeps an eye on the products you use, and reminds you when it's time to replenish your stock.

Because Alice is run as a platform for manufacturers to connect directly to consumers, rather than as a traditional [online retailer](#), founders Brian Wiegand and Mark McGuire say they can keep prices low and ship all items for free.

Of course, Alice benefits, too. Manufacturers pay the company for prime placement on Alice.com or to have samples, coupons and other marketing pitches offered to customers.

Wiegand and McGuire's last startup, comparison shopping site Jellyfish.com, was bought by Microsoft Corp. in 2007 and has since been incorporated into its new search engine, Bing.

Their idea for Alice sprung from what Wiegand and McGuire saw as the lack of easy ways to buy household necessities online. As McGuire jokingly tells it, "we really wanted to sell toilet paper on the Internet."

Alice, which is based in Madison, Wis., isn't the first to offer these types of products over the Web. Drugstore.com Inc. and Amazon.com Inc. are competitors, and Amazon offers a "subscribe and save" service.

But Alice is streamlining things by letting manufacturers sell straight to [shoppers](#). Product makers decide what to sell, set prices and collect all the proceeds from sales. Alice stocks products in a centralized warehouse, where workers pack the stuff up and ship it to buyers.

"We're really allowing manufacturers to be retailers and they don't have any of the hassles of that," Wiegand said.

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