



**UNECE**  
UN / CEFAC

**Executive Guide**

**eCommerce**

## Introduction

The electronic exchange of data for commercial transactions has taken several names: eTrade, eBusiness, eCommerce... These terms are often used interchangeably. However, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business, who has worked on the base semantics of data exchange for over three decades, has proposed some clarity in this area.

In this context, eCommerce is a commercial transaction between a buyer and seller which is initiated on an on-line platform. These two actors could be either economic operators (companies) or direct consumers. The on-line interaction is the eCommerce aspect. Computer-to-computer interaction would be considered eBusiness exchanges. These two terms are therefore not interchangeable, but complementary as the on-line purchase of a product will often trigger eBusiness data transactions.

For example, as a consumer, I purchase a table on an internet website. The actual purchase and most likely the payment as well are performed through internet website(s). Once the company where the table was purchased receives this order, they may need to send a series of messages to other actors on the supply chain such as a shipping instruction to the warehouse, a reservation of transport with a freight forwarder... and other actors on the supply chain may need to send messages to other actors such as detailed export/import declarations, as well as potentially other regulatory declarations. These subsequent messages, if electronic, would be considered eBusiness as they would be computer-to-computer.

**Worldwide eCommerce sales reached \$25.3 trillion**

## Applications

eCommerce, or on-line shopping, is certainly changing the business environment. It is resulting in a redistribution of the actors on the supply chain as certain intermediary professions are being eliminated; the services that these intermediaries once performed must be compensated. In a traditional high-street approach to retail, a central purchasing office would group orders and ship them as container loads to distributors in the consuming country. With the elimination of these two intermediaries, there is an explosion of small packages that are not regrouped for transportation, causing challenges to the transport industry. And the regulatory declarations are no longer being performed by a consignee at destination, but often need to be performed by the consumer themselves or by the transport companies on their behalf. And this results in a large

**90% of eCommerce sales were in the form of B2B transactions**

**In Europe, 43% of population are eShoppers**

number of individual declarations for regulatory agencies as opposed to the regrouped declarations of the past.

There is a call to develop new standards for eCommerce. It is clear that standard procedures for the above-mentioned challenges would be beneficial. It might be possible to propose standard templates for on-line retail websites or payments services. However, as far as electronic message exchange standards are concerned, these should be covered by electronic business standards that already exist. As demonstrated above, the initial on-line sale will result in traditional computer-to-computer exchanges of information. Perhaps some new elements need to be taken into consideration in these messages, but it does not seem – at this time – necessary to start from zero.

## Benefits

By using already developed UN/CEFACT semantic standards, these data exchanges will be interoperable with all existing standard messages in all sectors of activities. And should be semantically compatible with all standards developed by other organizations referencing UN/CEFACT semantics.

**In 2017, Romania experienced the highest eCommerce growth rate (37%) in Europe**

## More information

For more information, please visit:  
<http://www.unece.org/cefact>



# What is UN/CEFACT?

UN/CEFACT, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business, supports activities dedicated to improving the ability of business, trade and administrative organizations, from developed, developing and transition economies, to **exchange products and relevant services effectively**. Its principal focus is on facilitating national and international transactions, through **the simplification and harmonization of processes, procedures and information flows**, and so contributing to the growth of global commerce.

**UN/CEFACT has a global mandate. Participation in the UN/CEFACT Forum is open to all.** There are 1000 experts from every region in the world.

Within the framework of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) serves as the focal point for **trade facilitation recommendations and electronic business standards**, covering both commercial and government business processes that can foster growth in international trade and related services. In this context UN/CEFACT was established, as a subsidiary, intergovernmental body of the UNECE.

Participation in the development of UN/CEFACT standards and recommendations is free of charge.

If you are interested in joining us, you should register at <https://uncefact.unece.org/display/uncefactpublic/UNCEFACT+Expert+Registration>

All resulting deliverables are available online free of charge at <http://www.unece.org/cefact>

For more information:  
<http://www.unece.org/cefact>  
See also: <http://tfig.unece.org/>

UNECE secretariat:  
+41 22 917 1298  
Lance Thompson, Secretary UN/CEFACT  
[lance.thompson@un.org](mailto:lance.thompson@un.org)