The FedMall Enhancement Survey

August 2018

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Executive Summary

At the request of the Defense Logistics Agency ("DLA"), The Coalition for Government for Government Procurement ("The Coalition") conducted a survey of more than 700 FedMall suppliers to identify potential enhancements for the FedMall System.[1]

This paper presents feedback received from approximately 100 FedMall suppliers about the FedMall system functionality they need to efficiently and effectively deliver products to Federal customers. In the survey, suppliers were provided a list of potential future enhancements to the FedMall system and asked to prioritize each based on their level of importance to the supplier's company. In addition, suppliers were asked to provide additional enhancements for DLA to consider as part of its efforts to update the FedMall system.

To help promote a more efficient and effective FedMall system, the Coalition recommends that DLA implement the following potential enhancements to the FedMall System:

- Vendor read-only access to the user side of FedMall

- Catalog uploads posted to Commerce within 48 hours

- Downloadable catalog file extracts matching upload format

- Supplier notification when catalog has successfully posted to Commerce

Of the ten potential enhancements provided by DLA, these enhancements were identified with a statistical significance at a 95 percent confidence level as the four most important improvements by FedMall suppliers.

In addition, based on feedback received, FedMall suppliers recommend that DLA address the following objectives through system enhancements:

> *The Accessibility of Critical Information by FedMall Stakeholders.* Increase the transparency and accessibility of information in the FedMall system by removing unnecessary restrictions and improving system functionality.

> *The Usability and Functionality of the FedMall System.* Improve the user experience of the FedMall System to increase functionality, enhance timeliness, and improve consistency.

> *Customer Support.* Increase the customer support available to stakeholders that address current issues related to timeliness, value, and consistency.

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[1] This survey was distributed to 738 individuals identified by the Defense Logistics Agency from June 4 to July 2, 2018. Approximately, 100 responses were received, a response rate of 13.55 percent. The margin of error for the survey is 7.5 percent with 90 percent confidence. Further, the sample size is large enough to draw statistically significant conclusions about the opinions of the surveyed population of FedMall users.

Survey Results and Analysis

Question 1 – Ranking Potential Enhancements to the FedMall System Identified by the FedMall PMO

The survey provided respondents with an opportunity to communicate their preferences to the FedMall Program Management Office ("PMO") regarding potential enhancements to the FedMall System. The survey listed ten potential enhancements for its next FedMall system update that were provided by DLA. Respondents were then asked to rank these potential enhancements based on what was most important to their company. The potential enhancements listed in the survey were:

1. Vendor read-only access to the user side of FedMall
2. Downloadable catalog file extracts matching upload format
3. Minimum order amounts in MARKETPLACE – exact methodology TBD
4. Ability to sell commercial items which also happen to have an NSN assigned
5. Supplier notification when catalog has successfully posted to Commerce
6. Post a transaction ID for each file upload
7. Catalog uploads posted to Commerce within 48 hours
8. Ability to update order status notification to end users for all orders
9. Capability to hide supplier catalog upload activity records
10. Downloadable image file extracts matching upload formats

All 100 respondents provided a ranked list of their preferences, which was used to develop a "score" for each of the enhancements. The "score" was a value between 1 and 10, where 10 indicated that the enhancement should be the top priority. The table of values below provides the ranking of the ten enhancements along with the average score and a 95 percent confidence interval for each average score. The table also identified the number of respondents who stated that the enhancement should be the top priority.

Enhancement	Lower Bound	Average Score	Upper Bound	Top Priority
1. Vendor read-only access to the user side of FedMall	7.26	7.82	8.38	43
2. Catalog uploads posted to Commerce within 48 hours	6.85	7.35	7.85	26
3. Downloadable catalog file extracts matching upload format	6.44	6.90	7.36	10
4. Supplier notification when catalog has successfully posted to Commerce	6.18	6.60	7.02	6
5. Minimum order amounts in marketplace	4.41	5.04	5.67	6

6. Ability to sell commercial items which also happen to have an NSN assigned	4.36	4.84	5.32	4
7. Ability to update order status notification to end users for all orders	4.31	4.74	5.17	0
8. Downloadable image file extracts matching upload formats	3.83	4.36	4.89	4
9. Post a transaction ID for each file upload	3.75	4.10	4.45	0
10. Capability to hide supplier catalog upload activity records	2.81	3.25	2.69	1

The graph below shows the average score for each enhancement, as well as the 95 percent confidence interval for that score. The graph identifies, with statistical significance at a 95 percent confidence level, the top four enhancements requested by suppliers:

1. Vendor read-only access to the user side of FedMall

2. Catalog uploads posted to Commerce within 48 hours

3. Downloadable catalog file extracts matching upload format

4. Supplier notification when catalog has successfully posted to Commerce
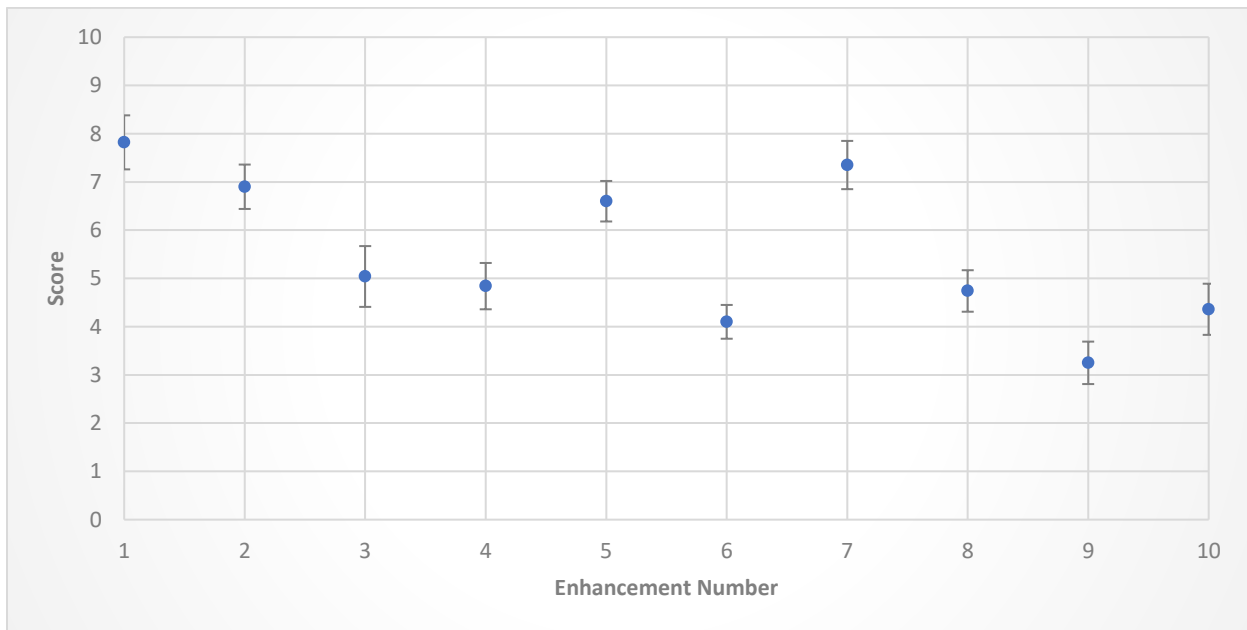
Question 2 – Additional Suggestions for Potential Enhancements to the FedMall System

Respondents were asked to submit up to three additional suggestions to further enhance the FedMall system and to provide their suggestions in order of preference. Of the 100 respondents who participated in the survey, 61 submitted 135 suggestions for additional enhancements.

According to the survey results, there are several additional enhancements to the FedMall System that FedMall suppliers would like to see implemented. The 135 suggestions have been organized by the Coalition into the following categories of additional enhancements:

1. System Usability and Functionality
2. Vendor Visibility
3. Customer Service/Vendor Support
4. Pricing and Sales Process
5. Product Additions
6. Shopping Carts

The following is a summary of the survey responses received.

1. System Usability and Functionality

FedMall suppliers report that there are a variety of issues related to the fundamental operations of the FedMall system that impact their ability to efficiently and effectively fulfill orders for Federal customers. Survey respondents stated that the processes for uploading information into the portal is inefficient, unnecessarily burdensome, and time-consuming. Accordingly, suggested enhancements for DLA's consideration include, but are not limited to:

- Simplifying the image upload process
- Increasing the file upload capability to support larger files,
- Enabling FedMall suppliers to replace an old uploaded file by uploading a new file instead of archiving discontinued items
- Assuring the consistency and dependability of the Supplier Catalog Format Validation Tool

In addition, survey respondents indicated that DLA should consider additional enhancements to fortify the infrastructure of the FedMall system. Specifically, the operating speed of the FedMall platform and access to information about customer orders could be improved. Survey respondents requested additional enhancements that would reduce load times and ensure critical information is disseminated across the platform in a timely manner.

2. Vendor Visibility

FedMall suppliers requested additional enhancements that would provide vendors and customer agencies with greater transparency and visibility in the FedMall system. Many respondents report that, currently, the FedMall system prohibits vendors from viewing, *i.e.* accessing, information that is critical to their ability to support customer agencies, locate items, and ensure competitive pricing. In particular, according to the feedback received, the current inability for FedMall Suppliers to analyze information related to product display and description,

as well as prices relative to competing vendors, has been particularly challenging for FedMall suppliers. Without such information, respondents report that vendors cannot ensure the accuracy, or competitiveness, of their product lists. Consequently, they request that, at a minimum, DLA consider additional enhancements to the FedMall system that would provide vendors with complete visibility of their own product listings and the customer portal. Several respondents suggested that this expanded visibility also include the ability to review other vendor's product listings and prices.

In addition, survey respondents suggested that DLA consider additional enhancements to the FedMall platform that would facilitate better communication between customers and vendors and improve the system's search function. Respondents report that the lack of basic contact information and search functionality hamper their ability to assist customers.

3. Customer Service/Vendor Support

According to the survey, many FedMall Suppliers have struggled to obtain timely assistance regarding specific questions and problems related to the FedMall platform. Further, survey respondents requested that challenges in obtaining critical information related to system maintenance and program updates be addressed to ensure that both customers and vendors are appropriately informed. Suppliers requested improved customer service within an appropriate time frame, for example, within 24 to 48 hours.

4. Pricing and Sales Process

Survey respondents suggested that DLA consider additional enhancements to improve the FedMall platform's pricing and sales systems. Potential improvements include, but are not limited to:

- Assuring sales pricing uploads within a 24-hour window
- Enabling vendors to offer customers tiered discounts based
- Providing comprehensive National Stock Number ("NSN") information
- Applying vendor's contract minimum order threshold

5. Product Additions

Respondents also suggest streamlining the FedMall system's product-add process through future enhancements so that vendors can quickly update their list of offerings. Specifically, survey respondents indicated that the catalog process is overly complicated, time consuming, and inefficient. Potential improvements proposed by respondents include, but are not limited to, removing duplicative fields in upload files, assuring product upload completion within a 24-hour window, and creating an "emergency" product-add process that would enable vendors to upload a small number of products within a very short time period in response to urgent customer requirements.

6. Shopping Carts

FedMall Suppliers suggested that DLA consider additional enhancements that would enable vendors to compile and send "shopping carts" to customer agencies. Respondents stated that this functionality benefits the government customer by saving time.

Question 3 – The Types of Contracts Possessed by Respondents

The survey asked respondents to identify the types of contracts that they hold as suppliers on the FedMall platform. The three options were:

- A General Services Administration ("GSA") contract
- A DLA contract
- No contract because they only participate in the FedMall Marketplace

Based on the results of the survey, most FedMall suppliers hold GSA contracts. Specifically, 86 percent of respondents reported that they hold a GSA contract either exclusively, or in connection with another contract type. Further, the survey found that very few FedMall Suppliers are participating on the platform without holding either a GSA or DLA contract, as only 6 percent of respondents indicated that they only participated in the FedMall marketplace. The following chart shows the contract types used by the survey respondents.
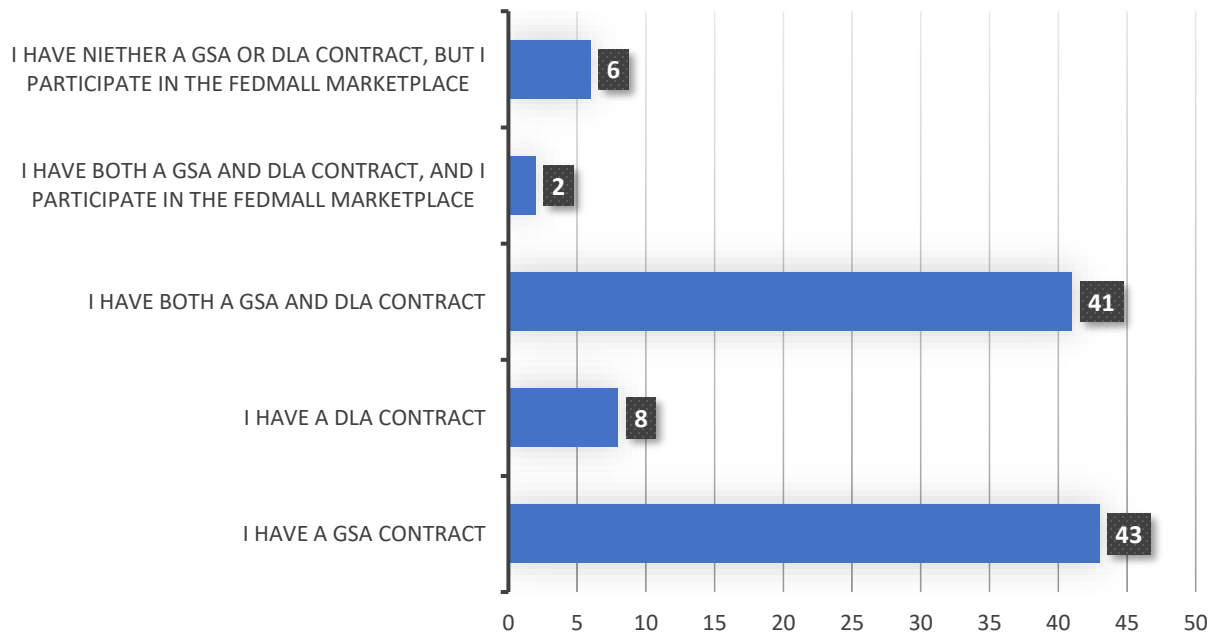
Question 4 – Current Order Delivery Method of Respondents

Respondents were asked to identify their current method for order delivery—EDI, cXML, or encrypted email. As depicted below, the survey results show that, currently, most FedMall Suppliers use encrypted e-mails or EDI as their order delivery method, while only a small percentage use cXML.
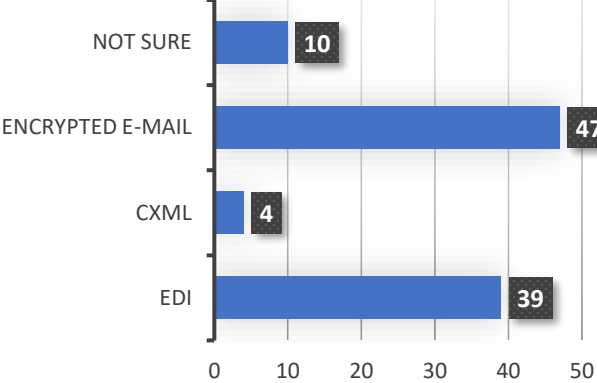
Question 5 – Current Usage of Value Added Networks by Respondents

The survey asked respondents whether they currently use Value Added Networks ("VAN"). Nearly 50 percent of respondents reported that they do not currently use a VAN, while only 29 percent answered that they do. The implication of these findings, however, is unclear because approximately 25 percent of respondents indicated that they were not sure whether they were currently using a VAN. The following chart shows the responses received for Question 5 of the survey.
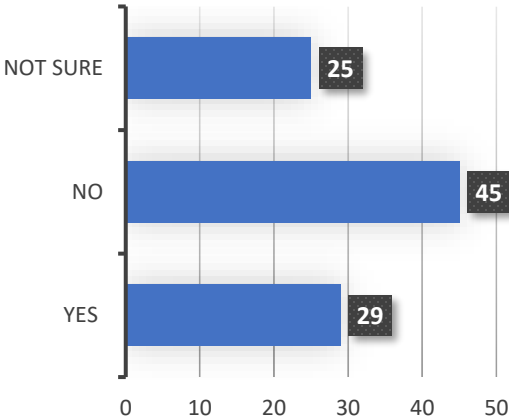
Question 6 – Current Usage of the Marketplace Pilot Program by Respondents

Respondents were asked whether they are currently offering products under the Marketplace Pilot Program. Approximately 29 percent of respondents indicated that they are offering products under the program, whereas 49 percent of respondents reported that they do not offer products under the program. Nearly a quarter of respondents indicated that they were not sure whether they were currently offering products under the program. The chart below shows the percentage of respondents who reported participating in the Marketplace Pilot.
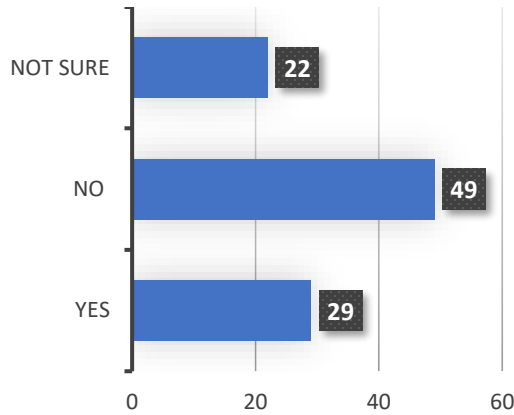
Question 7 – Additional Comments and/or Suggestions for the FedMall System

Respondents were provided the opportunity to submit additional comments and/or suggestions for DLA. Of the 100 respondents who participated in the survey, 33 elected to provide additional input for DLA's consideration. Respondents' comments were categorized by the Coalition into four groups:

1. Enhance the Ability for Vendors and Customers to Access Information
2. Provide Greater System Support
3. Make the FedMall System Faster
4. Improve the Usability of the FedMall System

The following is an overview of the comments and suggestions received in these four categories.

1. Enhance the Ability for Vendors and Customers to Access Information

Respondents requested that DLA identify opportunities to increase the transparency and accessibility of information in the FedMall System. In particular, suppliers highlighted two current limitations of the FedMall System – *i.e.* the current restrictions on vendor's information access and the platform's search mechanism – that are of concern to FedMall suppliers and customers.

According to respondents, the current restrictions on vendor's access to information within the platform undermines their ability to provide the desired level of customer service to FedMall customers. They are concerned that this dynamic may be driving purchases to other channels. In addition, respondents reported that current restrictions on access and visibility within the system has contributed to a sense of uncertainty and confusion among both vendors and customers. Respondents also requested improvements to FedMall's search function so that customers can easily use a vendor's name to locate products.

2. Provide Greater System Support

Based on the comments submitted by respondents, significant effort should be focused on addressing the quality of assistance available to FedMall suppliers. Respondents report that, to date, they have not received the support they need to effectively participate in FedMall.

Specifically, vendors have found that obtaining assistance can be challenging, and that it often takes long periods of time before any resolution is achieved.

3. Make the FedMall System Faster

Survey respondents suggested that DLA consider additional enhancements to the FedMall System that would enhance the user experience by reducing load times. They reported that the current operating speed of the FedMall platform, particularly the file upload process, is time-consuming and costly for vendors. This is especially concerning to small businesses, because it can negatively impact their viability in the long term as Federal suppliers.

4. Improve the Usability of the FedMall System

Suppliers request that the user experience of the FedMall System be improved. Survey respondents identified a variety of topics related to FedMall's fundamental operations – including, but not limited to, part number formatting, order processing, and file uploading – that obstruct vendor's ability to deliver best value solutions to FedMall customers.

Recommendations

To help promote a more efficient and effective FedMall system, the Coalition recommends that DLA implement the following potential enhancements to the FedMall System:

- Vendor read-only access to the user side of FedMall

- Catalog uploads posted to Commerce within 48 hours

- Downloadable catalog file extracts matching upload format

- Supplier notification when catalog has successfully posted to Commerce

Of the ten potential enhancements provided by DLA, these enhancements were identified with a statistical significance at a 95 percent confidence level as the four most important improvements by FedMall suppliers.

In addition, based on the feedback received, DLA should consider the following additional enhancements to the FedMall System as requested by suppliers:

- _The Accessibility of Critical Information by FedMall Stakeholders._ Increase the transparency and accessibility of information in the FedMall System by removing unnecessary restrictions and improving system functionality.
- _The Usability and Functionality of the FedMall System._ Improve the user experience of the FedMall System to increase functionality, enhance timeliness, and improve consistency.
- _Customer Support._ Increase the customer support available to stakeholders that address current issues related to timeliness, value, and consistency.

Attachment 1 – The FedMall Enhancement Survey

THE COALITION
for Government Procurement

The FedMall Enhancement Survey

* 1. The following is a list of potential enhancements to the FedMall system that have been identified by the FedMall PMO. Please rank these potential enhancements to reflect their level of priority for your company from 1-10. 1 being the greatest priority, 2 being the second greatest priority, and so on and so forth.

Vendor read-only access to the user side of FedMall

Downloadable catalog file extracts matching upload format

Minimum order amounts in MARKETPLACE - Exact Methodology TBD

Ability to sell commercial items which also happen to have an NSN assigned

Supplier notification when catalog has successfully posted to Commerce

Post a Transaction ID for each file upload

Catalog uploads posted to Commerce within 48 hours

Ability to update Order Status notification to end users for all orders

Capability to hide supplier catalog upload activity records

Downloadable image file extracts matching upload format

2. Please provide, in order of preference, any additional suggestions you may have for potential enhancements that are not included in the above list. We ask that you please limit each of your suggestions to 500 characters.

Enhancement #1

Enhancement #2

Enhancement #3

3. What types of Contracts do you have? Check all that apply.

☐ GSA

☐ DLA

☐ None, I only participate in the FedMall MarketPlace

4. What is your current Order Delivery Method?

◯ EDI

◯ cXML

◯ Encrypted E-mail

◯ Not Sure

5. Do you use a Value Added Network (VAN)?

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Not Sure

6. Are you currently offering products under the Marketplace Pilot Program?

◯ Yes

◯ No

◯ Not Sure

7. If you have any additional comments/suggestions, please provide them below. We ask that you please limit your comments to 1000 characters.

8. Who in your company would be the best person to contact for further discussion related to future FedMall enhancements (optional):

Name:	
E-mail:	
Phone Number:	
Company Name:	
CAGE Code:	