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## Get it right (from the start)

The internet is widening reliable access to the latest sailing hardware

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There is always a steady stream of new technologies filtering down from grand prix yacht racing and sailors at all levels are increasingly using the internet to monitor development and to purchase the latest equipment – in particular the newest hardware. From soft shackles, lash thimbles, Dyneema loops and strops to top-down furling systems, new technology offers light weight and strength, often for minimal additional cost compared with traditional products.

Lighter and stronger equals faster and safer which is a win-win scenario for any sailboat, whether it is used for club racing or blue water cruising. Rather than simply replacing your worn stainless shackles this winter, why not change them for soft shackles instead? However, as a consumer, how do I find out about the options available to me and identify the right products for my boat?

Compared to consumer goods, the sailing hardware market is small, dispersed and surprisingly difficult to reach for manufacturers. It's a Catch-22: the manufacturer needs to be big enough to develop worldwide distribution, but without strong international sales it is difficult for a new business to achieve the volume required and make enough profit to support further growth. The result: a few dominant global players, while the majority of smaller manufacturers, who are often the source of the most innovative technology, face a constant struggle for critical mass.

The internet along with reduced shipping costs are primary factors enabling a fundamental shift in how people buy goods and services; but though the marine industry is a perfect candidate for modernisation it has been relatively resistant to change. There are plenty of marine products online, mainly from chandlers who simply upload the contents of their warehouses; but many of the technical requirements and quickly challenges of supplying the latest, more technical sailing equipment online have yet to be properly addressed. However, there is now one company dedicated to improving this more specialist online service: **upffront.com**

With so many small marine manufacturers, there is generally a poor level of accessible technical information and it is often difficult to specify even relatively simple sailing systems with confidence. To address this, **upffront.com** puts great emphasis on high-quality and consistent technical information. It works with manufacturer-supplied information as a baseline, but the company has then

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created a standard set of terminology and measurements to allow easier product specification and quick comparisons between alternative products in the same category.

Most websites are built on a fundamental premise that you know what you want. However, using powerful filters, [upffront.com](#) assumes customers have a set of technical parameters and then offers a range of competing products based upon them.

For example, one of the most common interfaces is an eye-jaw rigging connection for which there are only three critical dimensions... however, it is amazing how often this simple information is not readily available.

[Upffront.com](#) places great importance on the standardisation of such interface dimensions, and over time the intention is to facilitate more complex, multi-manufacturer systems using online configurators with interface compatibility guaranteed.

Another critical part of being able to buy hardware confidently online is understanding what is, or is not, being supplied, for example, does that swivel come with a shackle? High-quality images with detailed technical descriptions give upffront.com customers an accurate representation of each product and what is – and is not – included. But if you are not sure, unlike on many sites, customers are encouraged to contact the product team by email or phone and talk through their options.

### Conclusion

The marine industry has been relatively slow to adapt to the significant advantages the internet offers its complex supply chain. In a rapidly changing technology landscape an internet-based, worldwide marketplace offers niche manufacturers a simple and fast route to market. It also offers service companies (riggers, sailmakers, refit yards) and boat owners alike the information they need to make informed choices with better pricing and faster international delivery – all with genuine personal service.

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