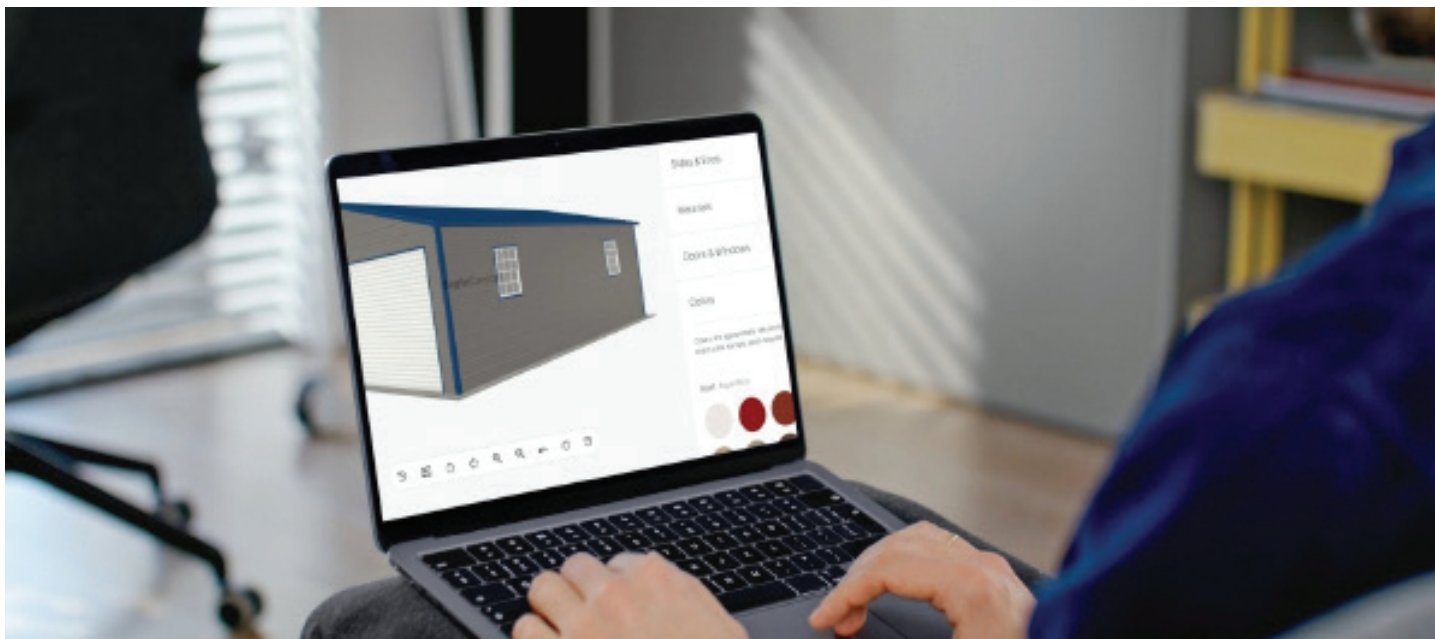


PARTNER PERSPECTIVE

SPRING 2026

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Building the Future:

How E-Commerce, CRMs & Tech Are Transforming the Industry

For generations, the rent-to-own (RTO) and portable building industries have thrived on in-person relationships, visible inventory, and the trust built with a handshake on the sales lot. But today's customer is rapidly evolving. Increasingly, buyers are starting their journey online, where they expect convenience and customization long before they ever step foot on a lot.

As a result, the industry is experiencing a powerful shift. Dealers who once relied almost exclusively on foot traffic are now finding that digital tools—particularly e-commerce platforms and customer relationship management (CRM) systems—are not only enhancing their operations but re-defining how their business grows.

E-commerce is a present-day opportunity to expand customer reach and capture demand that might otherwise be missed.

A well-designed website now serves as a digital showroom, allowing customers to browse inventory, compare options, and explore pricing 24/7. This initial online experience sets the tone for whether many buyers engage further.

What is evolving even faster is the level of interaction customers expect online. To supplement static images and basic product descriptions, immersive tools allow buyers to visualize their purchase in real time. Digital platforms are leading this shift by offering interactive 3D builders that let customers design their own structure—selecting sizes, colors, roof styles, doors, windows and more—all while seeing those changes reflected instantly on screen.

Generating online interest is only part of the equation though. As more leads come in through websites, social media,

and digital advertising, managing those opportunities becomes more complex. This is where CRM systems have become indispensable.

In an industry where timing and follow-ups can make or break a sale, a CRM acts as the central hub for customer interactions. Every inquiry—whether it comes from a website form, a phone call, or a walk-in visit—can be tracked, organized, and followed through to completion. For dealers juggling multiple prospects at different stages, this level of visibility is critical.

The impact is often immediate. Instead of relying on memory or scattered notes, sales teams can see exactly where each lead stands, when the last contact was made, and what the next step should be. Automated reminders and follow-up sequences ensure that no opportunity is

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SUPPLY MARKET UPDATES

LUMBER

Here we are already in the second quarter of 2026. As stated in previous newsletters, lumber material is a bit higher than when we started the year due to a few factors, some predicted and some a bit of a surprise,

Regardless of how, here we are. First off, the market has been somewhat busy compared to the end of 2025. Mills have been selling well. That brings on higher pricing so we can speculate that the housing market is on firmer ground than closing out last year, which is always welcome news in our industry.

Secondly, we have been seeing some rate cuts on 30-year mortgage loans. We finally have some sub 6% loans being done that has brought in new home buyers and allowed the housing market to pick up a renewed interest in purchases. If we see some sub 5% loans being done, then we will be off to the races on a solid groundwork for a robust and healthy economy. That still remains to be seen as we put together this update.

This brings us to the third and most unsettling reason for price increases in our industry, which is the cost of doing business. With the war in the Middle East, we have seen a huge increase in fuel prices. That factors into the bottom line on everyone's profitability with trucking, ocean freight, and rail being the main modes of transportation for products in the lumber world. This cost cannot be overlooked! This also could be the one thing that brings all the good news in the market to a halt. If this dispute drags out very long then all the positive gains in pricing and business can be wiped away very quickly! This still remains to be seen. Speaking as trader, I don't think we should be chasing price increases much higher than what we are seeing at this moment until we have a clearer picture of what this disruption in the Middle East is going to bring. So, watch for the opportunities and build inventories as your current business allows; I still think we could be in a good place if this war does not drag out for very long.

Lumber update provided by
David Fowler, *Three Oaks Trading*

STEEL

As we end the first quarter of 2026, the current state of the steel market is best described as stable, but uneven, with steady growth that is hindered by broader economic pressures. Demand has continued to heavily rely on commercial construction, with the residential side remaining softer due to elevated interest rates, along with an increased focus on strategic purchasing. As a result, the steel market is expanding, albeit sporadically, leaving some manufacturers with heavy backlogs, while others are experiencing stagnant order flow.

On the supply side, the steel industry, like all others, is dealing with the effects of the current state of the global economy. Tariffs have continued to have a substantial impact on the steel market due to how heavily the steel industry relies on Asian imports. While material availability is currently not a concern, prices have continued to remain volatile, which has led to many manufacturers opting for a leaner inventory. With the United States increased focus on domestic trading, USA-based suppliers have remained steady but not fully utilized, which portrays a market that is balanced, but not operating at peak demand.

Overall, the steel industry is currently operating in a slow-growth, late cycle environment. The companies experiencing success in this current market tend to be the ones that are placing a heavy focus on efficiency, automation, and strategic purchasing. While most outlooks continue to remain positive, the reality is that margins are tight and competition is strong, with educated and informed purchasing decisions being crucial. In short, while the steel market isn't declining, it isn't exactly booming either, which is requiring a strategic, measured approach to navigate effectively.

Metal update provided by
Brian McClain, *First Choice Metals*

DEALER FAQs

Q: What is the difference between a Security Deposit and a Purchase Reserve/CRA?

A: A Security Deposit is a required amount that is returnable to the customer at completion of contract as long

as the customer is not late more than twice. Security Deposit credit can be used at time of payoff or returned to renter after payoff via check.

The Purchase Reserve/CRA is an amount collected at time of purchase

to reduce the rental amount vs the retail amount. By applying a Purchase Reserve/CRA the customer can reduce their monthly payments. Some cases the Purchase Reserve/CRA must be required to reduce the retail amount to a rental amount that is qualified for rent

MEET OUR FIELD AGENTS

In prior spotlights we introduced you to Heartland's Territory Managers, who serve as the face of Heartland to our dealers. Today, we introduce you to one of our Field Agents, who serve as the face of Heartland to our customers.

Field Agents travel a LOT. Our Field Agents meet with our customers, usually at their home, to try and rehabilitate delinquent accounts before they move to repossession. They serve as Heartland's eyes, ears, and heart. Field Agents have that face-to-face conversation; they hear the customer's life story; they understand the reasons for delinquency; and they provide a path forward for each customer's account, whether that be by collecting a partial payment, re-contracting the unit, or arranging a voluntarily pick-up.

Rueben Giesbrecht joined Heartland in May 2025. He shares his experience here:

Q: What is your industry background?

A: "I grew up working with my dad in construction since I was a little boy. At 13, we started building sheds for a small outfit in Texas where I grew up. I helped build sheds with my dad for several years before going to work for a different barn shop about an hour away from the house. I worked there



for roughly a year or so before moving across the state to do metal roofing for a friend of mine. A few years later, I moved to South Carolina and started hauling sheds for Fisher Barns out of Abbeville, SC. I stayed there a little over a year before starting my own trucking business."

Q: What territory do you cover?

A: "I cover the southeast region including North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, and Alabama."

Q: What do you like about your job?

A: "What I like best about this job are the people I work with. It's an amazing work atmosphere. We can cut up and joke around with each other and make the workday fun. I look forward to going to work and talking to Brittany Reisner as well as Shayna Brazzell. They are my go-to people in the office when I'm doing site checks. They make my job easier. And I'm thankful for them and for what they do to help make my job easier on the road."

Q: Where do you think the shed industry is headed?

A: "I think the shed industry is going to continue to grow. There's no shortage of stuff piling up in people's garages and they're going to need a place to put it. They'll want their garage space back for other things. They'll go get a shed to put the stuff in and get their garage space back. In my opinion, we will see at least a 20% increase in the next 5 years."

Q: Tell us more about your family:

A: "I grew up with 5 siblings. I am the youngest boy in the family. We always had stuff we were doing ranging from hunting pigs in the woods to working on small engines and cars."

Q: What do you like to do when you're not working?

A: "When I'm not working, I like to go hunting and fishing, spend time with my family and friends, and work on my project car when I have the time and money for it. I enjoy mowing my lawn in the summertime and making it look as good as I possibly can. I'm also remodeling my house as time and money allow."

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overlooked, while built-in reporting provides insight into which efforts are driving results.

Beyond closing initial sales, CRM systems also strengthen long-term relationships. Customer interactions can extend over months or even years so maintaining consistent communication is key. A well-used CRM allows dealers to stay connected, identify upsell opportunities and generate referrals—turning one-time buyers into repeat customers.

Deeper integration between systems is becoming the norm. E-commerce platforms, CRMs, inventory management tools, and financing systems are increasingly working together, creating a more unified and efficient workflow. The result

is a fully connected process that benefits both the dealer and the customer.

Despite all this change, one thing remains constant: the importance of trust. Technology may change how sales are initiated and managed, but it does not replace the relationships that have long defined the industry. Instead, it enhances them—making it easier to communicate, respond, and deliver on customer needs.

Success will not come from choosing between traditional methods and modern tools, but from combining the strengths of both. Those who embrace e-commerce, leverage CRM systems effectively, and stay open to innovation will be best positioned to serve the next generation of customers—without losing the personal touch that built the industry in the first place.

CHECK OUT OUR DEALER RESOURCES

