Innovative Manufacturers
Prepare for Digital Success

INDUSTRY COLLABORATION POWERS THE NEXT GENERATION OF DATA SYNC

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In this lean economy, manufacturers are finding themselves fighting a digital battle as distributors and retailers clamor for more and better product information to satisfy information-thirsty, mobile-enabled purchasers. As eCommerce competition rages on, many electrical manufacturers are finding some of their biggest challenges to be within: hidden away in the quiet recesses of their own product data and processes.

"Manufacturers are challenged for many reasons; some have grown by acquisition and have several different technical structures within their company," said Del Nickel, past president of Pentair Technical Products. "Therefore, a lot of manufacturers have a multiplicity of information—customer data, transactional data, marketing data, etc.—that isn't integrated or aligned. This ultimately leads to costly errors and productivity loss for both manufacturers and distributors."

Disparate systems weren't as much of a problem when employees manually managed information and a catalog only had to be released a few times a year. Now distributors and other customers need comprehensive web storefronts, creating new uses and requirements for product information, as well as new competitive pressures.

"Years ago, internal product data was not meant for external publication," said Mark Richards, eCommerce director, Leviton. "Product data is going through a transition; the web has changed the way we view this information and has exposed the importance of having it in one place where it can be maintained and extracted quickly."

A CHANGING MARKETPLACE
One thing that has definitely changed is that product information has gone public—accurate or not—on numerous distributor and retailer websites across the nation.

"We had an 'A-Ha' moment when we saw examples of our product data on third-party websites that were completely inaccurate and misrepresented. Until then, I'm not sure we made the connection about where customers were getting that product data for their eCommerce sites. It was a wakeup call that it's really up to us—the supplier—to be responsible for providing accurate product data to customers and monitoring

our brands," said Dawn Wright-Perry, master data manager for Milbank Manufacturing Co. "Our trading partners need descriptive, robust product data now to do business."

With product information becoming so transparent to end users and mission critical to trading partners, manufacturers have strengthened their focus and commitment to data content and quality. But many manufacturers are still grappling with internal hurdles and roadblocks.

"We have more than 80 years worth of data. We have so many different SKUs, and so much data for each SKU, in different formats and locations. It would be helpful for manufacturers in our situation to be able to manage it in one place," said Ms. Wright-Perry.

Likewise, other manufacturers realize that to be more competitive, a more efficient solution is needed to integrate the different silos of internal product information.

"Cooper is a unique organization with several different divisions, some of which are heavily reliant on manual processes and are not fully leveraging the capability of our enterprise system. We're interested in taking it to the next level by consolidating internal processes and implementing a solution as a single thread across all divisions to improve our data synchronization efforts with trading partners," said Samer Shehadeh, EDI manager, Cooper Industries.

INDUSTRY INNOVATION—A GREAT IDEA
So what's a manufacturer to do? Electrical industry manufacturers and distributors have collaborated with IDEA, the electrical industry technology service provider, to produce a solution to help manufacturers aggregate and manage all their product information in one place. They've come together to create a new software tool that will help the industry achieve the next generation of data synchronization, the Data Management Platform (DMP).

The DMP combines the best of the electrical wholesale data synchronization platform (the Industry Data Warehouse or IDW) and the retail data synchronization platform (the IRD CERICOMX®), while incorporating flexible features that enable manufacturers to manage their internal data and customer-specific data. The new platform acts like an operating system on a computer: it provides a user-friendly, visual interface that a manufacturer can use to organize all its product data, including standardized marketing content, and it validates that information against industry and global standards as applicable.

Why is DMP important?

Accurate and complete product information is the competitive weapon that helped Amazon win out over Borders. And yet, a simple scan of Amazon makes it clear which manufacturers are supplying the best marketing data on their products and which manufacturers are content to allow inaccurate information flourish.

The marketplace is changing, and electrical products are being published in e-catalogs across the web—and quite often incorrectly. Your customers need more marketing information, but your data infrastructure might be a large barrier to overcome. You need a nimble, speedy response to market pressures.

IDEA's DMP enables your staff to consolidate all your internal data in one location and then validate and send it out to all your customers in both distribution and retail. This tool removes redundancies and replaces inefficient, manual processes: which ultimately improves your communications with customers and brings more dollars to the bottom line.

A number of manufacturers and distributors have been involved with the DMP for several months as pilot participants, helping IDEA to streamline the platform and plan for future improvements. While still in the initial stages of implementation, some of these companies explain why they want to be early adopters and share their progression towards the next generation of data sync.

STREAMLINED PROCESSES
Like many manufacturers, Cooper Industries has several divisions, each with its own process for providing product information to trading partners.

"We see our efforts as a two-pronged approach, with IDEA helping and guiding us. First, we are automating the process of sending product updates to the IDW throughout each division. Second, we are focused on integrating key marketing information into our data sync processes to help our trading partners compete. As we move forward with automating, we're looking at one single automated process across all Cooper divisions to enable daily product updates to automatically feed

> Creating one source of your product information, automating it through a certified data management platform and synchronizing it to multiple channels at one time—now that's a game changer

the DMP, hence populating the IDW," said Mr. Shehadeh.

While the company is still early in the process of implementing the DMP, Shehadeh already appreciates the tool's ability to streamline information across all divisions.

"The DMP adds value by consolidating the process and enabling us to publish the data one time, certify that it is accurate, and allocate it where needed to our trading partners," he said.

SAVING TIME
Manufacturers are also eliminating duplicate work and redundancies with DMP. Data synchronized through DMP complies with wholesale distribution industry standards and Global Data Synchronization standards.

"Due to differing channel standards and requirements, we had to reformat the same product data in a completely different manner and load it twice to synchronize it with distributors and retailers. With DMP, I can load the data just once, and

the tool is flexible and more user friendly," said Milbank's Ms. Wright-Perry. "It is a huge time saver. For example, using DMP, I was able to load about 130 items with standardized marketing content, and I did it in about 10 minutes!"

Since Milbank's product niche is utility driven, it's crucial that the manufacturer communicate specification changes quickly and efficiently to trading partners.

"We need one version of the truth for our product data that every department can use. DMP enables us to store our product information in one place, and it validates the data against industry and global standards based on the channel we send it to. This gives us more time to aggregate detailed, enriched product marketing content and provide it electronically," said Ms. Wright-Perry.

With more efficient processes, manufacturer staff can focus on more meaningful tasks.

"DMP will help alleviate the burden of looking through several databases, catalogs, and spec sheets—tying up multiple resources searching for data that's been requested by our trading partners," said Leviton's Mr. Richards. "We see DMP as having a tremendous impact on response time. The quicker we can get complete data to our customers, the quicker they can accomplish their goals."

In the digital marketplace, accessible product information is a critical competitive tool to ensure success.

"In this industry, it's really crucial that companies adapt to change and understand that the cutting edge, next generation of data synchronization is around us. IDEA is working with the industry to be ahead of the game, developing best-in-breed solutions," said Mr. Shehadeh. "Creating one source of your product information, automating it through a certified data management platform and synchronizing it to multiple channels at one time—now that's a game changer."

Visit IDEA's website (*www.idea-esolutions.com*), call (703-562-4600), or *email info@idea-esolutions.com*.

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