

# IDEA Connector Best Practices Guide

Recommendations for Managing  
Manufacturer Product Information



# OVERVIEW

Your product and pricing information is critical in the buying process. Product content guides customer decisions, informs sales initiatives and impacts purchases of your products.

Yet, managing product and pricing information can be challenging. It's important to define your vision, the intended use of your data and the key staff who are managing the process.

IDEA Connector has been at the forefront of product content syndication for two decades. When the industry works together, everyone benefits.

## Product Content Best Practices

To help you—our manufacturers—be more competitive, we're sharing best practices for data management.

Use this Product Data Management Guide to:

- **Define**—What characteristics are necessary in quality product data?
- **Benchmark**—How can I examine my costs, errors and staff workflows?
- **Identify**—How can a data audit identify issues with your product data?
- **Improve**—Fix errors, add product content and communicate with trading partners to enable more product sales.



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# Define Data Characteristics | Annually

## Ensure Quality, Informative Product Data

This best practice confirms that your product content meets each of these criteria for quality product data.



### Accurate

Item information is error-free, understandable and conveys the correct details, also known as attributes.



### Legitimate

Product data is valid and legally acceptable, with internal review on liability and validity.



### Timely and Relevant

The product information is up-to-date and applicable for real-time reporting.



### Granular and Unique

Product attributes provide granularity to define sufficient uniqueness or distinctive properties, so different products don't have the exact same data.



### Complete and Comprehensive

Product information is clear, informs the customer and includes required fields.



### Accessible

Product data is easily available to authorized trading partners and accessible to their business systems, staff and end user customers.



### Consistent

Content about the product matches across all sources. Contradicting product information is confusing and delays purchasing decisions.

# Benchmark Reporting | Annually

## Examine Costs and Errors

These best practices examine your pain points and costs from product data problems, so you can prioritize with limited resources.

### Calculate Costs for Product Data Maintenance

Your cost estimates should include staff, technology and error resolution. On average, it costs \$1 to verify a record as it is entered, \$10 to fix it later and \$100 if nothing is done.\* Allocate a percentage of your budget to ensure product data maintenance.

### Document Errors

- Identify the amount of staff time that is used to fix data errors. Staff can log their time spent on errors for a time period, like a week or month.
- Document how many hours or days it takes to correct product content errors reported by a trading partner. The **best practice** is to **respond to a trading partner within 48-72 hours** and **correct the error as quickly as possible** using the UI features or as part of a scheduled update.
- Document your error rate. The error rate is calculated as the total number of errors divided by the total number of items. **The best practice is an error rate of 15% or less.**

\*Source: [forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com), 1-10-100 Rule from the book, "Making Quality Work: A Leadership Guide for the Results-Driven Manager" (Labovitz, Chang, & Rosansky).

## WHAT'S THE COST OF AN INCORRECT PO?

A popular metric is to document the cost of an incorrect purchase order (PO). This can spotlight the cost of a common error, while also enabling you to trace the error and make any necessary corrections in your IDEA Connector product data.

# Benchmarks Continued | Annually

## Review Processes & Workflows

These best practices benchmark the availability of your digital product content.

### Calculate Manual Efforts & One-Offs

Review processes to see how many one-off efforts are made to provide product content to trading partners vs. syndicating through IDEA Connector. Document the obstacles and any other reasons for these manual efforts. Review opportunities to automate these manual processes.

### Document Timeline for New Products

Identify how much time it takes for your team to load digital product content on new products for your trading partners. The best practice is to provide digital product content as it occurs so trading partners have access within **24 hours of product launch**.

### Review Obsolete Products & Price Changes

The best practice is to upload this information **as it occurs**. Confirm that this is happening so your trading partners receive this critical product information the next day after a change. This ensures they are selling your products with accurate information and prices.



# Product Review | Annually

## Identify Issues with a Product Data Audit

This best practice examines how your product data is displayed to end users and reviews consistency.

### Review a Sampling of Your Items on 3-5 Trading Partner Websites

- Review critical fields, images and timeliness of information.
- Document missing or incorrect product/pricing information.
- Do your products reflect positively on your brand?
- Does information provide end user buyers with answers to their questions?

### Compare Items in Data Sources

- Document the differences between trading partner websites and data sources, like IDEA Connector and your public website.

- List what attributes or SKUs need to be addressed.
- Calculate the percentage of incorrect information for those products to get an idea of scale.
- Are your trading partners and their end users are receiving the most accurate information?

### Gather Trading Partner Feedback

- Reach out via survey or during other interactions.
- Determine what gaps your company has in product content.
- Prioritize issues that are important to your trading partners and end users.

# Maintenance Review | Ongoing

## Improve Your Product Content

These best practices enable you to solve immediate errors and progressively improve product content for your trading partners. By using IDEA Connector's tools and reports, you can easily identify errors in your product content and fix the issues.

### Identify Gaps and Reach Distributors

- Follow the product life cycle. Start with a pre-launch item status of **I (Introductory)** through the product's end of life **O (Obsolete)** and then removal **D (Delete)** from IDEA Connector. This ensures end users always have the most up-to-date ordering status.
- Review product status codes and stock indicator codes. Ordering problems happen when items are coded incorrectly as active stock or quick ship when they are nonstock or unavailable.
- Load price changes in advance to allow the distribution channel to work with their end users for necessary adjustments.
- Review your load summaries and resolve errors. When product data loads error-free, it is easily extracted by distributors for use in their ERP/PIM and data warehouse systems.
- Distributors want all your data and all your SKUs. If you don't load an item or series of items, it limits distributors' ability to sell your products and can affect overall sales.
- If you have an item for sale on your website, the item also needs to be in IDEA Connector for the distributor to have access to the item.

### SOLVE DATA ERRORS

The best practice is a quarterly review for smaller companies while larger companies may review daily, weekly or monthly.

- Develop a systematic process to fix data errors.
- Gain buy-in and resources from leadership.
- Look for low-hanging fruit: small changes with big impact.
- Work with internal departments to access accurate and timely product information directly from the source.

# Add New Data | Monthly

## Syndicate All SKUs and Product Attributes at No Extra Cost

Many manufacturers are investing in product content initiatives to fill in gaps that are slowing sales.

Manufacturers are encouraged to provide all their product content to IDEA Connector. The platform can hold unlimited SKUs and unlimited attributes at no extra cost to manufacturers.

IDEA Connector can syndicate unlimited images, 360 images, marketing bullets, seller defined works, spec sheets, warranties, social media and over 500 additional attributes.

A best practice for product content additions is to organize updates by product family or by popularity of your products.

Adding information by product family enables efficiency gains and a logical roadmap for staff to follow.

## IDEA PRO DATA SERVICES GIVE YOU A BOOST

Accurate and complete product content can boost your sales and eliminate expensive errors. Yet, fixing data can take a lot of time. IDEA can now add more bandwidth to your product information team and extend your digitization project resources. Our experienced Pro Data team can handle your data projects—simple or complex. Get a boost from one of the industry's most trusted data providers.

### Product Information & Price Loading

- Packaging Data
- Marketing Brands Content
- Product Life Cycle Updates
- Distributor Net Pricing

### Integration Services & Mapping

- Automating M2M Data Loading
- XML or EDI
- Custom Mapping for Distributor Specific Loads

### Special or Custom Projects

- Conversions or Mergers
- Time Sensitive Deliverables
- Staff Supplementation
- Distributor Specific Requirements

### Consulting & Analysis

- Distributor Usage Analysis
- Missing Data Analysis
- Data Quality Research
- Custom Training for User Specific, Group or On-Site Sessions



# A NEW, EASIER WAY TO COMMUNICATE

Although it has always been important to communicate with trading partners, now it is easier than ever.

The IDEA Connector Data Integrity Hub enables distributors and manufacturers to communicate directly about item-level data concerns. Manufacturers have a dashboard to review and manage all data integrity concerns.

## Communication Best Practices for Manufacturers

- Review the Data Integrity Hub daily.
- Acknowledge a distributor concern within 48 hours. The Data Integrity Hub is a one-to-one direct relationship.
- Investigate reported issue.
- Solve issue or provide feedback to distributor within 30 days.

### THE DATA INTEGRITY HUB PROVIDES...

Quick product data issue reporting directly to your product content team. Distributors can easily report product data problems via real-time alerts, so you can avoid costly errors.

## Inhouse Data Management Resources

All people creating, gathering or loading data should reference these documents prior to doing larger data changes quarterly. These documents are in the IDEA Connector Learning Management System (LMS). They have a change log included, and you'll be notified with an announcement when any significant changes are made.

**IDEA Digital Marketing Content Guidelines**—Provides standardized electronic marketing content format guidance through IDEA's Master Data Management (MDM) platform.

**IDEA CAS Attribute Value Guidelines**—Suggests formats for some of the CAS attribute values that may be populated with numeric formats; or may have a range of values or multiple values; or are Boolean values. The suggestions are not required formats, but give the user a more normalized list of results that are especially helpful for web site navigation.

**IDEA Catalog of Descriptive Fields**—Outlines the best practice for establishing Catalog Numbers and Description attributes as found in the IDEA Connector Data Model.

**IDEA Category Attribute Specification**—IDEA identified common attributes for electrical industry related products classified in the United Nations Standard Products and Services Code (UNSPSC) code set. Some classifications are made more granular with an industry-specific 4-digit code, called an IGCC, coupled with the UNSPSC commodity code, to allow for more specific product identification. IDEA created the unique attribute abbreviations and descriptions associated with each of the attribute labels identified in the Category Attribute Specification.

### FEATURED: IDEA DATA DICTIONARY

This document provides names and definitions for attributes in IDEA Connector.

- Best Practice: Use IDEA's Data Dictionary for a full list of all the available fields in IDEA Connector.
- Use this important reference as you work to enhance all your product content as much as possible.

## IDEA Is Here to Help

IDEA has extensive experience in eBusiness. It's our mission to make it easy for you to expand product content, EDI automation and become more competitive.

**We can handle all your eBusiness needs, from product content syndication to digital operations.**

- ✓ 20+ Years of Experience
- ✓ Pro Data Team
- ✓ Industry-owned and Supported
- ✓ Best in Class Customer Service
- ✓ Distribution and Manufacturing Experience

Whatever strategy you choose, IDEA is here for you. We can help you navigate the complex world of eBusiness for maximum results.

## Next Actions

When you reach out to IDEA, here's what to expect.

### Outline your eBusiness Strategy

- Determine your pain points, current situation, goals, growth, staffing, costs; consider using this white paper as a guide).
- Schedule Discovery call with IDEA

### Discovery

- Consulting expertise to help you explore and navigate options
- Additional in-depth help and analysis is available through professional services

### Develop a plan

- Recommendation for the path that makes the most sense

To schedule a discovery call with the experts at IDEA Connector, **call 703-562-4600.**

“ Online experience is **crucial** to a good customer experience. We want to ensure our distributors are empowered with **all the content possible** to provide that **best-in-class** customer experience.

Southwire has put a **huge emphasis** on creating **digital assets** that showcase the benefits our products. Digital assets help the customer ultimately make a decision on a purchase.

Why wouldn't we want our distributors to have access to content to **tell the story** of our **value proposition**? It's a **win-win** for everyone.

”

**Breanna Roller**  
**Digital Marketing Manager**  
**Southwire**

**Contact IDEA Today**  
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