



## How Does Your Data Get Integrity?

**A**s a Trade Service customer, you know that the product and pricing data you receive each week originates at the manufacturer. But have you ever wondered what happens to the data along the way? In this month's message, we would like to provide insight into this question and invite your feedback. The subject of data is not as cut and dried as some people may suppose. There is the notion that data is simply data and it should be fairly straightforward to move it from the manufacturer to the distributor, all ready to load and use.

### Data cleansing: Is technology enough?

There is also the notion that if the data is run through an automated process to make sure certain data fields match to prescribed parameters, what comes out the other end is clean, accurate, and complete. After all, this is the technology and information age and there must be tools available to make this task a no-brainer. Seems logical, but when we take a closer look at the nature of data, the tools that have been developed to process it (and their limitations), and the pitfalls that can appear at various points on its journey, quite a different picture starts to emerge. We find that much more is needed than automated processes to successfully move data from start point to end point, ensuring that once it arrives, it can be effectively received and applied.

### Trade Service: A different provider

At Trade Service, an all-important mix of technology and human resources comes into play to ensure this smooth passage of data. This is essentially what differentiates us as content providers and we've been doing it quietly for many years.

The manufacturer data we receive is put through two levels of progressively stringent electronic quality control processes. Then, each data element receives a rigorous, in depth scrutiny by a staff of industry-savvy professionals. The first electronic process matches and compares each data element coming in with its corresponding field location in the Trade Service data schema. In the second and more refined electronic process, we



*Denise Ng examines each data element to ensure it is exactly what the manufacturer intended to send.*

take into account the inconsistencies in the way we often receive manufacturer content from one time to the next. In one case, we store 24 different data maps, due to the various ways in which that manufacturer communicates data to us. When the content provider has a one-size-fits-all approach, not taking into account the possibility for variance in the way manufacturers submit their information, data can easily be mis-positioned within the schema.

### Could this happen to you?

This problem occurs regularly with some content providers. In one recent instance, a large manufacturer provided UPC's for 2,908 of their items to the content provider's database. In that manufacturer's next update, the UPC field for those items was empty! They had decided to provide the 13-digit EAN number instead. As the content provider did not acknowledge this change, they were unable to alert their customers. Nor did they contact the vendor to request that the UPC field be populated. In such an instance, when the data is downloaded by the distributor who uses the UPC as the record key, these items cannot be updated. Inconsistencies of this nature are common with other content provider

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# How Does Your Data ...

services, forcing the distributor to reconcile issues on the receiving end. If these unanticipated changes are not addressed, the repercussions for the distributor are obvious.

## The human element ...

Only by subjecting data to a combination of sophisticated electronic data processing programs, followed by engaging a team of highly-trained specialists to physically look at the data, can we ensure that your weekly feed will arrive at your door on time, accurate, and in a form that is easily input into your computer. Once the data has successfully moved through the electronic phases, it must then pass a third and final stage, the administrator level, before it can be cleared for sending to you. At this critical point, specially-trained experts, who have been thoroughly versed in the unique nuances and subtleties of each manufacturer's product content, look at every data field of every item that is scheduled for release. It's at this stage that we catch anomalies that a purely electronic process is not able to notice. Any inconsistencies or irregularities are reported back to the manufacturer for final review and approval. Four such examples occurred recently over just one week due to the content provider's lack of visual data inspection:

1. One manufacturer changed the Column 3 Trade Price on a popular item from \$6.02 to \$0.02. The provider's automated cleansing tool simply requires that a price be present, so it did not notice this error. But because we look at every field of every item, this anomaly jumped out at us.



Jesse Taylor carefully maps data fields he receives from manufacturers.

2. Another manufacturer submitted several duplicate catalog numbers which were received and released without notice by the content provider. Our toolset does not permit duplicates in keeping with requirements of today's business system software.
3. A prominent manufacturer inadvertently referred to an obsolete item as active. We noticed the word "obsolete" in the description of this item, so we were able to verify the correct status of the item before issuing it.
4. In another example, a 2004 trade multiplier was inadvertently used by one manufacturer to calculate the new 2005 price. The content provider did not see this as an error, so 5,037 incorrectly priced items were released to their customers.

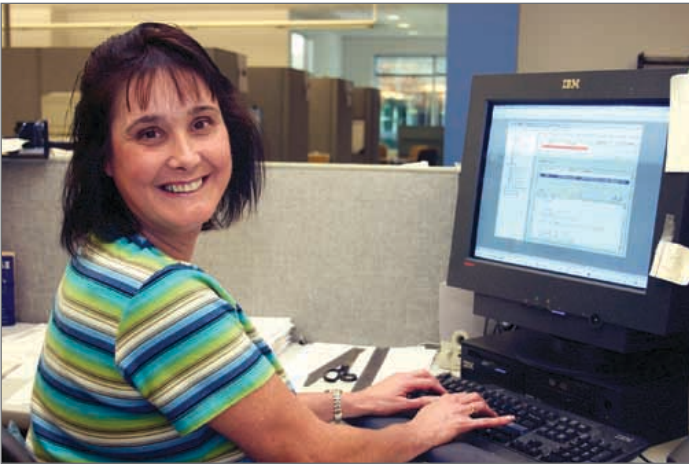
Examples like these are frequent. In each case, our data administrators caught, reviewed with the manufacturer, and remedied the problem before it was sent to our customers.

At Trade Service, before any data reaches you, it has undergone exhaustive processes which have been developed and honed over many years to ever-finer standards. As much as we all would like, no automated system has ever been developed that is able to receive data from its source and 100% successfully move it to its final destination within the specific parameters required by the end-user. We see this even in the automotive industry, where almost every process has been fully automated. Despite these processes, specially-trained quality control individuals are watching at the end of each stage of assembly to visually inspect the product. Defective parts are not allowed to continue past that point.

## Devil in the details ...

Trade Service treats data in much the same way. Technology works very well for the vast majority of data that it processes. But what isn't often realized and can make the difference between a profitable and unprofitable distributor, lies in the details ... those persistent bits of data that can escape electronic scrutiny. You, the distributor, become the last line of defense to discover these on your own, hopefully before they enter your business system and do their damage. Ordering the wrong part, miscommunicating a critical product feature to a customer, or selling an inventory item for half its value are all examples of what can happen if just one data

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Data anomalies cannot escape Linda Miller's sharp scrutiny.

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element gets overlooked or entered incorrectly. We at Trade Service have built our business around minimizing that possibility.

### Where lies the burden?

Some providers, due to their limited resources and knowledge, place the burden of data accuracy and integrity on the two ends of the supply chain and serve merely as a clearing house: Manufacturers must send it correctly and distributors must receive it correctly. At Trade Service, however, this entire burden lies squarely with us. As a Trade Service customer, you have a provider that does not simply rely on basic, unintelligent, electronic mapping devices to rubber stamp your data as "OK" to release. Although we do employ these functional tools to do much of the legwork, there is no substitute for applying even higher levels of automation to separate the chaff from the wheat. And finally, the intelligent human attention to detail we add to the mix finds the most subtle of mistakes

the electronic tools miss. And when we are ready to deliver the data to you, it's sent in a format that will work with your business system. This may seem like another no-brainer, but when you investigate other providers, many are not able to provide this level of output flexibility.

### You always have a choice ...

The industry offers you a choice of content providers. We hope this message helps convey that not all providers are the same. Thank you for choosing Trade Service. If you would like more in depth information on our data handling process, let us know.

*More info on page 4.*

## Thank you for choosing us!

*These distributors recently chose Trade Service as their content provider:*

**Bergen Industrial  
Consolidated Parts  
Controller Service & Sales  
Farnsworth Wholesale  
K/E Electric  
Live Wire Electrical  
Madison Electric  
Newton Electrical Supply  
Pontiac Electric Supply  
Post Road Electrical  
Reliable Distribution Group  
The H. Leff Electric Co.  
Westway Electric Supply**

## About Trade Service

**For seventy-five years**, Trade Service has been synchronizing the supply chain. With the original Biddle Book in 1931, PFMS in 1971, and e-commerce solutions today, we evolve to ensure manufacturer products are marketed, sold, and represented in ways that distributors can reliably and efficiently use.

Today, over 1,000 distributors use our information to power the systems that drive business results. Now and into the future, Trade Service is committed to supply chain synchronization. We are expanding relationships with distributors, manufacturers, and

system vendors – launching initiatives such as our Distributor User Group and Manufacturer Alliance Program. We continue to drive real results for our customers, enhancing industry-proven solutions and delivering new offerings such as On Demand data synchronization to build the underpinnings for supply chain advances like RFID.

Past, present, and future – Trade Service strives to remain the benchmark provider of synchronous information.

*More info on page 4.*

# Trade Service introduces TRA-SER® Platinum!

## Material Pricing At Your Fingertips

(Exclusively for distributors – contains manufacturers' published cost)



TRA-SER Platinum features the industry's most current and complete database, and so much more...

- Electrical: 1.4 million items, over 400 manufacturers
- Plumbing: 1.4 million items, over 600 manufacturers
- Long descriptions with attributed content for better product definitions and easier searching
- 100,000 item cross-reference feature that allows comparisons to like items (electrical only)
- High quality color product images
- Links to manufacturer catalog pages
- Automated Internet price updating through a scheduler (update your system at night when you're not there!)
- Enhanced search engine with category drill-down look-up methods
- A wonderful desktop complement to your enterprise computer system

Call us for more information on **TRA-SER Platinum** at **800-710-8987**

## We Look Forward to Seeing You At These Events in 2006

Trade Service will have a booth or meeting suite at each of these upcoming distributor conferences in 2006. If you will be attending any of these events, come visit us and let us show you how our content services can benefit your business.

Event	Location	Date
NAED Region 1 (Western)	San Diego, California	January 11–14
AHR Expo	Chicago, Illinois	January 23–25
NAED Region 2 (Central)	Orlando, Florida	February 22–25
WIT & Co.	Orlando, Florida	March 6–10
Prophet 21 Summit	Las Vegas, Nevada	March 21–24
IMARK Showcase	Chicago, Illinois	March 31–April 1
Infor User Conference	Las Vegas, Nevada	April 9–12
NAED National Meeting	Orlando, Florida	April 22–26
ISA Convention (ISCON)	San Antonio, Texas	May 20–22
Affiliated Distributors (ISD)	Grapevine, Texas	September 5–7
Affiliated Distributors (PLB-PVF)	Grapevine, Texas	September 11–14
WIT Stockholder's Meeting	Minneapolis, Minnesota	September 13–16
Affiliated Distributors (ESD)	Grapevine, Texas	September 18–21
IDEA Forum	TBD	September 26–28
Intuit-Eclipse User Group	Orlando, Florida	October 18-21
NAED Region 3 (Eastern)	San Antonio, Texas	November 7-12

Trade Service – The trusted provider of quality product and price information since 1931

**TradeService™**

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