



## Case Study

The Value of Sharing Marketing Content through the IDW: Manufacturers, distributors and contractors discuss how a new initiative is benefiting their companies.

Since IDEA introduced the Bands of Excellence rating system to help bring more robust product data to the electrical industry, the marketing content in the Industry Data Warehouse (IDW) has increased over tenfold. This robust content is flowing downstream to thousands of electrical distributors and their customers in the contractor, industrial, and MRO markets, helping them buy and sell the best products for the job.



*"Going to JH Larson's website is faster for us, and we can be assured that we have the right information because it is coming directly from the manufacturer through our distributor versus some unverified website out there. Ultimately, it is a lot simpler to go to one website, instead of having to go to three or four places to find the marketing content I need."*

Dan Poss  
Purchasing Manager  
Frisbee's Inc., Contractor

### A Quest for Robust Product Information

Without direct access to a manufacturer's robust product information, distributors and end-users find obtaining accurate information on a specific electrical product can be a challenge, especially online.

For purchasing managers like Dan Poss of Frisbee's Inc., an electrical, plumbing and HVAC contractor, the frustration of searching for product information can be an all-too-familiar feeling. Results frequently turn up incomplete information, lacking important details such as size, color, technical specs and photos.

"I used to have to search for the item number on Google and go through three or four websites to find the information or spec sheets that I was looking for," said Poss. "Or I would have to call my distributor and try to explain it over the phone."

Often, the lack of product information available can lead to purchasing errors and returns, consuming even more time and energy.

"You don't want your people to get to the job site and then find out that you didn't buy the right thing. Then you have to take it back, get credit for it, and order something else," he said. "So accurate information is important. My plate is full, and I need to find all the content I can to make my job more efficient."

With busy customers seeking faster and better information, robust product data is driving sales. "The goal is: how do we provide better information to the customer? The more data we can get to the customer, the more likely they are to buy from us. And, the less administrative work we have to do in the background to support it, the better," said J.R. Tapper, Director of MIS, J.H. Larson Co. "We have to get the marketing data from the vendor: that's how we are going to sell more of our vendor's product."

### Banding Together as an Industry

With the increasing need for robust product marketing data, IDEA introduced the IDW Bands of Excellence rating system and sourcing initiative.



**about case study** This study was conducted by a third-party consultant through a series of interviews in 2012.



### Glossary:

#### **Specification Documents:**

Product brochures or spec sheets that provide technical details.

**Attributes:** Product information based on its characteristics, (brand, voltage, color, etc.) which enable customers to search and select products.

**Images:** A good visual of the product that customers can view to confirm they are making the right choice.

**Descriptions:** A text summary of a product's key features that help define and/or differentiate it from other like products.

**Stock products:** Products ready for sale through distribution, which are usually on-hand or inventoried by the manufacturer.

The Bands of Excellence program measures each manufacturer's completion percentage for providing robust marketing content to their trading partners through the IDW, which includes population of **specification documents, attributes, images, and descriptions** for their **stock products** (see glossary sidebar for more information). Manufacturers who are providing this essential marketing content to their trading partners are being recognized for their support through this program. These four elements were selected as measurements because together they encompass the minimum content a distributor needs to add a product to their web storefront.

Manufacturers Electri-Flex and ILSCO quickly responded to their distributors' requests to participate in the program.

"Some of our key customers brought it to our attention that the attributed data was really important to their business. We gathered all the powers within our company—leadership, sales, marketing, IT—and dedicated the resources to make it happen," said Dennis Linden, National Sales Manager, Electri-Flex Co.

Electri-Flex was in the process of upgrading its ERP system, so most of the 22 attributes of extended product information for its 700 products needed to be developed for the IDW. The company decided to go above and beyond what was mandatory, and in less than 60 days, the company's IT manager, Dan Stevenson, accomplished the impressive task of populating 100 percent of its stock products with marketing content, including images and spec sheets. As a result, Electri-Flex achieved the Platinum Band of Excellence, the highest level in the program which recognizes manufacturers who populate the essential marketing content for 75-100% of their stock products.

For ILSCO, the journey to the Platinum Band of Excellence was a logical next step after years of preparation.

"We've been involved with IDEA since the beginning, so we had developed the building blocks and were prepared," said Jim Kosciolk, Senior VP Sales & Marketing, ILSCO. "Attributed product data was important to the industry so it was important to us. We focused attention on it, put in a little elbow grease to it, and got IDEA the marketing data in the format they needed."

ILSCO's process consisted of its product specialist, Randy Shelley, converting the company's marketing content to the appropriate format and developing the spec sheets using its website. ILSCO also supported its channel of choice by populating 100 percent of its stock products with marketing content and achieving IDEA's Platinum Band of Excellence by the time the program was announced publically.

### Impact on the Supply Chain

Now that ILSCO, Electri-Flex and dozens of other manufacturers have populated their products with robust marketing data in the IDW, what impact is it having on the supply chain?

Crum Electric Supply, a distributor of both ILSCO and Electri-Flex products, is using the attributed marketing data from the IDW to build an internal catalog within its business system. The catalog will provide the information customers





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### Key Benefits to Providing Marketing Content to the IDW:

- > Decreases purchasing errors and returns
- > Simplifies the purchasing process for end-users
- > Increases the likelihood that end-users will buy your products
- > Enables faster and more effective customer service

have the right information because it is coming directly from the manufacturer through our distributor versus some unverified website out there. Ultimately, it is a lot simpler to go to one website, instead of having to go to three or four places to find a spec sheet," said Poss.

Poss also uses the marketing content on JH Larson's website before he purchases an item; he double-checks to make sure it looks right and has the correct specifications.

"It helps quite a bit. I like having the pictures and additional information; it makes me confident to know that I am buying the right thing," said Poss.

### Preparing for the Future

Manufacturer support of the Bands of Excellence has led to rapid increases in marketing content for the products in the IDW. Since the program initiated, the marketing content in the IDW has increased over tenfold. Progress is being made, but the future offers opportunity for growth and efficiency.

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"There's no doubt: more customers are requesting information in an electronic format, and this is just going to grow," said Crum's Hockin. "Manufacturers are discovering how valuable it is for them to be in control of their data, managing how it is being presented and who is representing it. The IDW creates that opportunity for us."

**Please contact [info@idea-esolutions.com](mailto:info@idea-esolutions.com) to find out how your company stacks up in the Bands of Excellence program, or to find out how you can begin providing marketing content to your trading partners through the IDW.**



**companies featured** **ILSCO** ([www.ilsco.com](http://www.ilsco.com)), **Electri-Flex** ([www.electriflex.com](http://www.electriflex.com)), **Crum Electric Supply** ([www.crum.com](http://www.crum.com)), **Border States Electric** ([www.borderstates.com](http://www.borderstates.com)), **JH Larson** ([www.jhlarson.com](http://www.jhlarson.com)), and **Frisbee's Inc.** ([www.frisbeesinc.com](http://www.frisbeesinc.com)).

**about idea** The Industry Data Exchange Association, Inc. (IDEA) is the official technology service provider and eBusiness standards body of the electrical industry. The company helps thousands of electrical manufacturers and distributors find the most cost-effective methods for running day-to-day business. Their applications also bring value to vertical markets such as industrial, retail, and consumer-packaged goods.

2900 Crystal Drive | Suite 500 | Arlington, VA 22202  
P 703.562.4600 | F 703.562.4650 | [www.idea-esolutions.com](http://www.idea-esolutions.com)

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