

IDEA producing the DNA of the eCommerce supply chain

Business information and communication data standards maximize supply chain efficiency. Data standards are the DNA of the supply chain and enable companies to better serve their customers, deliver products more efficiently, improve trading partner collaboration, reduce operational costs, and enhance internal business processes and external business relationships. Companies that adopt and use standards have a competitive advantage over those that do not adopt and apply this approach.

If the supply chain is the engine that drives the economy, then information is the fuel. But, it all begins with accurate, unambiguous, and timely information based on standards. Adopting industry standards reduces friction and gridlock within the supply chain and enables companies to focus more on their customers.

When the Industry Data Exchange (IDEA) was established by NEMA and the National Association of Electrical Distributors, the responsibility to manage, develop, and produce business information and communication standards became a key role for the IDEA Standards Committee (ISC).

"The ISC is responsible to choose, interpret, and shape industry specific versions of open, public, non-proprietary international and industry group standards," says IDEA President Mike Rioux. The groups that develop such standards include GS1 and its affiliate organizations such as the United Nations Standard Products and Services Code (UNSPSC) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) ASC X12. The IDEA Standards Committee is made up of representatives from manufacturer, distributor, and software companies that are IDEA customers and affiliates.

Currently, the ISC meets face-to-face four times a year, with additional scheduled conference calls. These meetings are organized to review and approve recommendations of the subcommittees and assign new tasks to improve the value of the standards to the industry. The committee is led by Chairman Gerry

Bignell, Data Integration Manager, WESCO Canada, and Vice-Chairwoman Ann Adams, Channel Operations Manager, Square D/Schneider Electric.

Since supply chain standards cover a wide variety of topics, the ISC has established subcommittees to concentrate on specific areas and develop and propose guidelines for EDI, EDIFACT, XML, Data Content, Flat File, Product Identification (Bar Code and RFID), and Product Code (UNSPSC), as they apply to North America.

"What I would like to see this year is one major project completed by each of the subcommittees," says WESCO's Bignell. "For the Data Content subcommittee, this project would be the submission of an updated product data

descriptor document to NEMA, so they, in turn, could send it to the ANSI Standards group. The Product Identification subcommittee is tracking the impact of RFID on our industry; it would be nice to have a preliminary report by year-end from this subcommittee."

The eight subcommittees are Data Content; EDI Content; Product Identification; XML; Product Code; Flat File; Standards Awareness & Communications; and EDIFACT.

The IDEA Standards Committee is open to all IDEA customers and affiliates. For more information regarding the IDEA Standards Committee, contact the IDEA Standards Manager David Frenkel at (703) 841-3257 or dfrenkel@idea-eSolutions.com. 

IDX2 August traffic volume sets new record

The Industry Data Exchange (IDX2) processed five billion characters of business data in August 2006 (5,100,000,000 to be exact) setting a new high for e-business traffic in one month. Since IDX2 became operational in April 2002, traffic volume has increased from 1,000,000,000 to 5,100,000,000 characters per month. In the same time frame, the IDX2 customer base has grown from 50 to 280.

Over the past three years, IDX2 has maintained a near 100 percent reliability record offering customers the ability to process EDI, Flat File, XML, EDIFACT and Web Form documents.

IDX2 offers interconnections to all global Value Added Networks (VANs) through its Sterling Commerce gateway and direct connections to over 50 different internet (TCP/IP) based networks like IDX2. The IDX2 Tracker provides unequalled capability to track and monitor the status of business documents routed both through the IDX2 network and the Sterling off-network gateway.

An IDX2 Tracker training module has been developed to provide customers with easy step-by-step directions that are administered on a self-help basis. Interested parties may email IDX2 Manager Tom Guzik at tguzik@idea-eSolutions.com for access to this training module.

Companies using the IDX2 typically save 50-90 percent over other service providers, and high volume users (100,000 kilo characters or more per month on net traffic) enjoy even deeper discounts. To learn more about how the IDX2 can help drive down operating costs, contact Pat McCartin, IDEA sales manager, at (978) 454-7819 or patmccartin@att.net.

