



Quality of information is key for master data to be of use.

How master data can allow retailers to thrive

Master data can be the life blood of suppliers and retailers, if only they would use it consistently and correctly. **Mike Wheeler** explains.

Master data has been around for a long time, but is something that can be taken for granted if not utilised properly. A recent report by KPMG titled *Unlocking the Value of Tomorrow's Retail* stated that master data “defines the attributes of an organisation’s products, customers and suppliers, is and always has been a core component of business operations, providing essential

information, and serving as an enabler of efficiency across many aspects of business”. This is all true. However, a company’s master data is only as good the information that is being input.

Suppliers to the food and beverage industry are key components in making sure that the information available is correct, to the point and offers consumers/business partners all they need to know about a

specific item. This is especially so over the past decade as consumers become more circumspect about not only what ingredients make up a certain product, but where it was manufactured, where the aforementioned ingredients were sourced, and whether there are any potential allergens in the product.

GS1 director of retail, Andrew Steele, knows that quality information is the key, and has been around long enough to know that there was a time when collecting data was not given the attention it deserved. That cannot be the case though in today’s environment with increased regulatory and consumer demands.

“When I was working for a supplier to retail many years ago, there was the Universal Item Submission (UBF) Form which was the standardised master data form that suppliers used for the major supermarket retailers,” he said. “This was where you included such information as the product description, order unit, barcode

number, product dimensions, price etc. The fundamentals of master data have always been there. What has evolved over the years is the channel of how the supplier can share that master data. It has evolved from paper-based forms to be shared via electronic means.

“Today, there are more advanced systems in place, but there is still an underlying issue around data integrity. If your data is not good quality or incorrect, it doesn’t matter how efficient the mechanism is that you have to receive it, incorrect data is going to cause issues for everyone in downstream processes.”

Quality control of products is becoming more important as the number of data fields a supplier provides to retailers has grown significantly, according to Steele. There is no better driver of this data being important than the current COVID-19 situation. People spent a lot of time online, which offers up a good example of why quality master data is important because consumers are not physically in the store and they



Master data is integral for retailers and wholesalers to make sure their products have integrity.

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cannot hold the product in their hand and cannot read the product description, nutritional data, allergen declarations, and other relevant product information.

"In the online world, you are relying on that to be on your screen. That is where if the retailer doesn't have that accurate, quality data supplied by the supplier it makes it really hard," Steele said.

Steele sees GSI having a couple of roles in making sure that master data is kept intact and giving retailers, suppliers and consumers the right information to make informed decisions. They see master data as being complete and standards based.

"The role of GSI, as we see it, to provide open global data standards that can be used by all industry stakeholders. One person might call it a barcode number and somebody

else a product number. You need to bring standardisation to the mainly conventional data fields to make it easier for people to look at. It needs to be consistent."

Then there are the practical applications of master data and how it is utilised. Ingredients, places of origin and similar information is important, but there is also a whole range of other data that has to be part of the data set – safety issues for example.

"If you don't get things like a carton's dimensions correct, and subsequently the pallet Ti Hi configurations and weight, then it can result in OH&S issues," said Steele.

For Steele, a key takeaway for him is that master data is a fundamental requirement that will feed into and drive online, automation and technology



People are wanting to know more information about what is in the food they buy.

processes and solutions.

GSI's Australia's National Product Catalogue can be an ideal starting point for a company trying to get its master data on track.

"It's an electronic catalogue that suppliers can populate their master data, have it validated before it is pushed through to the appropriate retailer," said Steele. **F**

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