



The wholesale industry will benefit if it allows suppliers to mine its data, says **Tanya Pepin**

In today's age of technological and digital progression, we now have unprecedented access to a rich vein of data and insight. These insights offer organisations potential for advancement and growth in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

As processes evolve, it has taken a while for our industry to catch up with what digital experts have known for a decade – that knowledge is power.

Yet, suppliers are not taking full ownership of the wholesale data they purchase, they are instead reliant on data that is supplied to them by wholesalers. This is normally in predetermined reports provided by a third party.

This makes suppliers vulnerable to the potential loss of data that comes with provider-change or business collapse. Palmer & Harvey (P&H) is a case in point – if suppliers had not downloaded and stored their raw data, the actual shipment data would all have been lost when P&H closed.

Imagine a shift in thinking, where forward-thinking suppliers are no longer reliant on wholesalers or third parties for the format of their data. Instead, they have the protection of taking in raw data that they would then own in perpetuity. Suppliers would then be taking control of their data journey by driving the agenda on how they mine and store the raw data they purchased from a wholesaler.

Consider the competitive advantage to a supplier who builds their own wholesale data set and uses the insight from this data to drive new strategies, while giving unrivalled, tailored support to its wholesale partners by actioning bespoke insight in each wholesale route to market and customer business type.

But, inherent in a data strategy of this nature is a bond of trust. Wholesalers have long been wary of sharing data – believing correctly that it is one of their biggest assets.

If they are to entrust suppliers to take ownership of their data to build a joint



Pepin believes that it has taken the industry too long to realise that knowledge is power

strategy, then it is incumbent on the supplier to treat the data responsibly. Wholesaler memories are long, and stories of suppliers taking data and then using it for direct sales operations are still cited as very good reasons for not sharing data.

Of course, wholesalers can still be selective about what data they share – customer names and addresses can be withheld and anonymous account numbers shared instead.

The trick is in sharing enough so that suppliers can invest in basket analysis, complex distribution research and customer behaviour trends. This work is beyond the reach of many wholesalers who lack the resources for data-intensive analysis, but it is also beyond the reach of most suppliers right now because the data is not currently

delivered in a way that enables detailed transactional analysis.

As the sector changes and the digital age creeps inexorably onwards, effective use of data is going to become totally imperative.

Maybe the suppliers who take the step to build their own data set and then work in partnership with supply chain operators to share learnings from the data will be the ones with a real competitive advantage in the future – not just because of the data-driven sales they acquire, but because wholesalers will be relying on them because they have found a way to deliver continual growth each year in an ever-competitive marketplace. ●

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