ETIM: Introducing the Global Classification for Technical Products

What is ETIM?

ETIM is a system for classifying technical products, and has been adopted by a range of industries including Construction, Shipbuilding, Plumbing, Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) and, of course, Electrotechnical.

The ETIM classification lists the most important technical characteristics for any product. It is multi-lingual (translations for international markets are automatic), supplier neutral and can be served up in print and online.

How did ETIM start?

It all started in the Netherlands in the 1990s, where installers had trouble finding products. They recognized that the model they devised as a solution could offer benefits that transcended geographical borders and markets.

ETIM-International was established in 2008. Based in Maastricht in the Netherlands, it is the coordinating hub for the global march of the standard.

ETIM is global: to date, the ETIM classification has been adopted across 14 countries in Europe, and in the USA and Canada. Currently, 7 million products use the ETIM standard.

Have any organisations in the electrical sector adopted ETIM already?

Yes, there are 18 manufactures across Europe who have already committed to the ETIM classification standard:

3M; ABB; Draka; Eaton Electric; Feilo Sylvania; GE Consumer & Industrial; Gewiss; Hager; Hellermann Tyton; Legrand; OSRAM: Philips Lighting; Phoenix Contact; Siemens; Schneider; Thomas & Betts; Wago; Weidmuller

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Why is ETIM important for the supply chain?

There is a mass of product information cascading through the supply chain, from manufacturer to wholesaler and from there through to printed brochures and websites, with no agreed guidelines for what that product information contains.

For example, the information could include a mix of:

- Physical characteristics
- Performance
- Estimating data
- Part numbers and GTIN codes
- Commercial info, such as packing units, pricing and discount codes
- Compliance
- Marketing: images, video, logos, promotional product descriptions, and so on

The manufacturer needs to supply product information to their wholesaler clients, but there is no sector-wide standard for the content and format of that data. Manufacturers vary hugely in the comprehensiveness of the data they can provide: ranging from the barest pricing information at one end of the scale, through to BIM-enhanced datasheets and 3D objects at the other.

Each wholesaler has to deal with these varying levels of information, turning them into content which can help drive sales.

Why is the EDA championing ETIM for the UK?

The licenses for ETIM are only available to non-commercial organisations. Across Europe, the in-country trade associations have championed the introduction of the ETIM standard. In the UK, the EDA holds the ETIM license.

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Is ETIM a database?

No, it is a classification standard first and foremost. If the UK electrical supply chain adopts the ETIM classification, however, one option to be explored is a central database to manage the UK's ETIM product data.

How long might it take for the UK to adopt ETIM?

Certainly this is a huge undertaking. At this stage we are working to at a phased journey, along the following lines:

Phase 1 (to June 2017): spreading the ETIM message and identifying partners

- EDA presentation programme to manufacturers and wholesalers and their key teams
- Listening to feedback
- Establishing Standardization Committees for each product stream, with members drawn from manufacturer and wholesaler organizations

Phase 2 (June 2017 – June 2018): getting to grips with the data

- Standardization Committees agree product classifications
- Moving to one ETIM model
    - ETIM aligned supply chain
    - Wholesaler systems ready to receive ETIM data
    - Manufacturers systems ready to send ETIM data
- Quality and quantity of data improves
- Explore central database options

Phase 3 (June 2018 – June 2019): focus on data quality and quantity

- Introduce Data Quality Standards & Awards
- Ongoing improvements to quality and quantity of data
- Database options agreed and implemented

Advantages at a glance

- Smooth transfer of data through the supply chain to the customer

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- Heightens the information available to the customer, helping them to easily find the products they need
- Data can be used for multiple purposes without rekeying or reformatting
- Supports improved customer service
- Increased efficiency
- Avoids inconsistencies of data and therefore reduces stock control and ordering errors
- High levels of automation in processing data results in fewer labour-intensive work-arounds
- Aids stock management

For more information on ETIM, the UK initiative and how you could get involved please contact:

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