DEMYSTIFYING THE PRODUCT INFORMATION EXCHANGE STANDARD

Volume 6: The Description Segment – Definitions and Uses of the Description Codes

FOREWORD

Demystifying the Product Information Exchange Standard (PIES)

The Auto Care Association Product Information Exchange Standard (PIES) is a robust and thorough standard for the exchange of a broad range of Product Information pertaining to the Automotive Aftermarket industry.

The Standard was adopted in its first form in 2004, and several enhancements and additions to the standard have been adopted in the intervening years.

The PIES Standard is a very powerful standard, covering over 180 different data elements that can be transmitted. However, it has never been necessary to use PIES to convey a complete set of data as per the standard. The PIES Standard can be used to convey a number of different types of information, either in a complete file format, or in 'segments', depending upon capabilities of the manufacturer, and the needs of the recipient.   In simple terms, PIES can be sent in small 'bites', depending on the needs of the recipient.

While it is a best practice within a manufacturing environment to consolidate source data in a Master Data Management strategy, it is not uncommon for different departments within a data recipient's organization to require its own specialized data, and not a complete Master Datafile. There has been strong adoption within the recipient community to adopt the PIES standard and maintain synchronized data between logistics systems, there are a number of unique 'data recipient points' which all require product information.

For example, the Buyer's department may need a Price File, or an Item Setup File. The Marketing Department may need special market copy, promotional pricing, and additional images or brand logos to set up promotions publishing, and so on. Typically, all these departments require their own distinct data sets. Why not use PIES to send it to them?

The purpose of this series of Whitepapers is to help develop a common understanding that the PIES Standard can be used for special single purpose uses, as opposed to a Master Data File, thus accommodating the needs of the various recipient's constituents.

In this way, companies can use the PIES standard for much smaller-scale initiatives, without heading down the path of a major, Master Data Management initiative.

The following describes, in non-technical jargon, just how the PIES Standard can be used, what information it can carry, as well as providing some examples of how to use parts of the PIES Standard as 'single purpose' files, meeting the needs of different users.

This is the first in a series of Whitepapers which will provide practical examples of how to use parts of the PIES standard.

Volume 1: Using PIES for Pricing

Volume 2: Using PIES for Product Attributes

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Introduction

The Segments of PIES and What They Are Used for

Price Sheet Segment

The Price Sheet Segment is used only when Prices are being sent to a recipient.

The Price Sheet Segment identifies, for the recipient, the Price Sheet Name and Number, its Effective and Expiry Date, the Currency in which Pricing is being sent, and to what Zone or Region the Price Sheet applies. If you are sending multiple price sheets for different regions or zones, then you simply create a PIES Price File for each region or Zone. See the section entitled, PIES for Pricing, later in this document.

Market Copy Segment

The Market Copy Segment is a new segment of the PIES Standard, and is used to send rich, descriptive content, images, and other digital assets, which relate to the sending Company, its Brand, or a Sub-Brand or Product Category.

The Market Copy Segment is a companion to a PIES File, and its content is generally used by Recipient's Marketing Departments or Webmasters, to gather publishable descriptive copy and images or other digital media, for general contents for websites and other marketing and advertising needs. Company Logos, Warranty Information, Brand Features and Benefits, Instructional Videos, and other such information are typically conveyed in the Market Copy Segment.

Item Segment

The Item Segment is the 'meat' of a PIES file, and covers many different areas of part information which are crucial to various parts of the recipient's business. The Item Segment contains a number of sub-segments, each able to provide specific additional information about a part. They include:

Description Sub-Segment

The Description Segment contains 15 different ways to describe a part. These descriptions are used in many different ways by recipients.

Pricing Sub-Segment

The Pricing Segment is used specifically to send specific pricing information about the product. The difference between the Pricing Segment and the Price Sheet Segment is that the Pricing Segment is intended to send information specific to the part number, as opposed to more 'global'

information, thus giving it flexibility on a part by part basis. Things such as Price Levels, Price Break Quantities, specific effective and expiration dates, publishable and net pricing can be conveyed in the Pricing Segment. See the section entitled, PIES for Pricing, later in this document.

Extended Product Information (EXPI) Sub-Segment

The Extended Product Information Segment, or EXPI Segment, has become an increasingly important and versatile segment of the PIES Standard, handling 7 different extended areas of information requirements for a business.

Package Segment – a means to convey packaging dimensions and information at all package levels, from unit package, through cases and pallets, to containers.

Hazardous Material Sub-Segment – a means to build and convey an electronic HAZMAT manifest for the product, including all regulatory codes required to ship hazardous material.

Kit Sub-Segment – the means by which to send a list of materials contained in a product that is a Kit.

Part Interchange Sub-Segment – the means by which to send interchange information specific to a product, including comparative grade levels and comments referable to an interchanged part.

Digital Assets Sub-Segment – the means by which to send a wide variety of different types of electronic media, from images to technical drawings, installation instructions, planogram information, or even line art for a product. The technical information that accompanies a 'digital asset' would be used to confirm quality and consistency by the recipient, according to industry best practices, and would be used extensively by a recipient's Webmaster, or Publishing department. The Auto Care Association's Technology Solutions Committee has published a comprehensive document outlining best practices in the conveyance of electronic media, entitled "*Automotive Aftermarket Imaging Best Practices Guideline*".

The 3 Things Every PIES File Must Have

When creating a PIES File, there are three key elements any type of file must have:

1. **Header Segment** – this Segment identifies, at a minimum, what Version of PIES file is being sent.

2. **Item Segment** – this Segment identifies, at a minimum, a Part Number and its Brand, and what the recipient is to do with this information (i.e. Are you sending a record that is being Added, a

record that should be Changed, a record that should be Deleted, or whether this is just a confirmation file and No Change is required.

3. **Trailer Segment** – this Segment identifies how many Part Numbers are being sent in the file, and the date the file was generated.

Every other Segment of a PIES File is optional, depending upon the material you are sending to accompany the Part Record.

The Power of Content Delivery from Manufacturer to Consumer:

Leveraging the Use of the Codes Used in the Description Sub-Segment

The Power of Content Delivery: From Manufacturer to Consumer

The PIES description segment provides the opportunity for a manufacturer to convey consistent and accurate descriptions of their products through the Supplier, Retailer, and even the Consumer. This provides the power to directly relay a product's most important details in narrative form and with proper context directly to the retailer, and ultimately, delivery direct to the retail consumer.

The users of product information within the selling chain are diverse, and their use of descriptive content varies, depending upon their role. The following examples are intended to provide insight as to how your sell chain partners use accurate Description information.

EXAMPLE 1 – The Supplier and Distributor

- **Supplier/Distributor** - The supplier/distributor frequently provides sales technical support as the retailer's point of contact for questions a customer may have regarding your products. Rarely is the distributor suited to provide this low level sales support to the retailer, and is tasked with directly contacting the manufacturer for correct answers. Providing accurate product descriptions and features that can be conveyed to the retailer helps to lower inquiries, provide accurate first hand answers, and increase sales and speed of product delivery.

  In addition, providing accurate product descriptions helps distributors to identify poorly labeled or un-boxed products, increase inventory accuracy, correct product delivery, and reduce inventory loss.

EXAMPLE 2 – The Retailer

- **Retailer** - Consistent high levels of descriptive content allows the retailer to be best prepared for the sale of your products with accurate information to support and answer the customers concerns, helping to build a consumer level confidence in your product.
  As well, providing quality content that can be presented at a consumer level without additional work to clean up or clarify helps the retailer to speed the delivery of your products to "market" faster.

EXAMPLE 3 – The End Consumer

- Consumer - The end consumer has the ability to research products prior to ever stepping foot in a retail environment, effectively making the consumer self-sufficient in determining the correct products for themselves. Effective product descriptions and content filtered down the supply chain effectively provides the manufacturer the opportunity to show their products in the best light to the consumer, and relay important details and values of the product that may be lost through conventional sales processes.

  This helps to reduce returns based on incorrect or poor descriptions of purchased products, and increases consumer faith in the manufacturer's products and retailer's delivery.

Best Foot Forward: How to Use PIES Description Codes

The PIES description segment provides 15 unique opportunities to provide several types of product content to your customers. In some scenarios all of these opportunities may not directly relate to your products (such as VMRS Descriptions and UNSPC Descriptions), however it is the best practice to utilize as many of these opportunities as possible.

Choosing to utilize each of these descriptions to their fullest extent allows your wholesalers and retailers to choose the content that best serves their needs in distributing and supporting your products.

ABR (12 Characters) Product Description - Abbreviated

An abbreviated version of the product description, which is typically used and shared between business systems. Alternatively, some additional uses include the 'categorization' of similar products without using a Product Line Code.

The following represent simple examples of abbreviated product descriptions. You may want to consider consulting with your trading partners as to their intended use of Abbreviated descriptions.

Example –

"WINMTR" (Window Motor)

"FOGLMP" (Fog Lamp)

"DRLOCK" (Door Lock)

DO NOT: Create abbreviated Product Descriptions which simply 'truncate' a longer description.

SHO (20 Characters) Product Description - Short

A short concise description of the product described at a "simple" level. Typical use of the Short Description is on the ITEM MASTER record on business systems, providing the user with a basic description of the product.

Example –

"Alternator"

"Water Pump"

"Spark Plug"

Best Practice - *The Short Description should not be utilized to deliver a brand name, product attributes, qualifiers which segment the product or descriptive text, as these types of descriptions have better suited established elements for delivery. Some examples of incorrect short description usage would be:*

"90 Amp Alternator"

"High Flow Water Pump"

"Pre Gapped Spark Plug"

INV (40 Characters) Product Description - Invoice

A description used to describe the product for use in a receipt/invoice. This description shows up in the resellers' Point of Sale system, and is also used by the operators of the system to qualify products.

Best Practice - *A good invoice description should provide as much detail as possible within the character limits to accurately identify/qualify/confirm the product quickly. Idealistically this description should be similar to a combination of the (SHO) short and (DES) product descriptions, as well in some cases the brand name.*

Example –

"AC Delco Alternator 90 Amp"

"Holley Water Pump High Flow"

" NGK Spark Plug Pre Gapped"

DEF (80 Characters) Auto Care Association Part Type Description

Used to relay the Part Terminology Name from the Auto Care Association Product Configuration Database (PCdb). While it is typical to convey the Part Terminology ID from the PCdb with an item, it is less common to send the DEF description. This is generally because all trading partners likely use the Auto Care Association PCdb, and can de-code the PCdb code. However, in some circumstances with large-scale retailers using other standards, the Auto Care Association Part Type Description can help better categorize the product for their cataloging purposes.

Example –

"Center Console"

"Door Lock Cylinder"

"Seat Belt"

ASC (2000 Characters) Associated Comments

A description used to provide additional comments on the product that may not be suitable for delivery within the other predetermined description elements. This "open palette" can be used to convey comments such as minor product changes or manufacturing anomalies in the product that have no impact on the overall application, function, or attribute of the product.

This description can also be used to ensure the customer that the product is not blemished or damaged as well.

Example –

"Color shade may vary"

"Products may have rounded corners"

"Some units may have a plastic or steel cover"

KEY (2000 Characters) Key Search Words

A description used to provide a list of product specific key words and/or phrases that have a great significance to the product. These phrases do not always directly refer to or define the actual product, but can sometimes relate it to other things like the products action, commonly related accessory, or even the products use/purpose.

These provided key words can ultimately be harnessed or leveraged both internally (inventory and point of sales systems) as well as externally (Web Sites, and Search Engine Marketing) by your PIES recipients to assist with finding, sorting, and recommending your products quickly.

Example –

<div align="center">

Description – "Windshield Wiper Blade"

Keywords – Replacement Blade

Window Blade

Wiper Arm

Bug Remover

Wiper Refill

</div>

Best Practice *- It is strongly recommended that multiple keywords are separated by a comma or semicolon delimiter to avoid misinterpretation of the data.*

In addition, the keyword description should be expected to evolve, adding new ones as they are found/recommended, as well as occasional reviews to better "fine tune" the keyword accuracy.

LAB (80 Characters) Label Description

This description is used to convey a recommended label name to distributors and retailers to help quickly identify the storage locations of products. It is acceptable to include brand or trademark names in this description if it will assist to organize similar products.

Example –

<div align="center">

"Vandelay (TM) Valve Springs"

"Vandelay 2 (TM) Valve Springs"

"Vandelay PRO(TM) Valve Springs"

</div>

DES (80 Characters) Product Description - Long

This description is used to convey the product's primary selling attributes or features.

When this description is used in conjunction with a provided short description, it produces a distinctive product description that will assist in differentiating quickly between similar products.

Example -

"90 Amps, Internally Regulated"

"High Flow"

"0.45 Pre-Gapped"

Best Practice *- It is recommended that if sending more than a single detail that a comma or semi-colon delimiter be used to avoid confusion in the information being relayed. Although 80 characters are available, only "High Level" product attributes or features should be conveyed, additional attributes and features should be delivered using the "EXT" Extended product description.*

Specific marketing *- related Features and Benefits for product lines or brands should be sent using the Market Copy segment 'FAB' code. More on this can be seen in the companion Whitepaper, "Using PIES Rich Content, and other Market Copy".*

Note *- Common incorrect usages includes providing brand names, trademarked names, installation instructions, or supplementary product notes. These types of content should be delivered through their established PIES elements.*

SHP (2000 Characters) Shipping Restrictions

This description is used to convey shipping instructions, notes, and warnings that are specific or unique to the shipment of that part number, regardless of whether the part is shipped individually or in bulk.

Proper use of this description should be to convey notes identifying limitations in shipping destinations, shipping climate warnings, additional equipment needed for handling/delivery, pallet stacking heights, etc..

Examples-

"Prohibited for airplane transport"

"Truck delivery requires a forklift to unload"

"Maximum safe stacking height of three pallets."

"Requires refrigerated transport in warm climate states."

Note *- Typical incorrect usage includes - notes on additional delivery fees, declaration of emissions eligibility in certain states, boxing/packaging (Height, Width, Length, Weight), etc.*

These types of content have established delivery methods in other PIES elements.

SLA (2000 Characters) Slang Description

This description is used to provide popular or common slang terminology that may be used to describe the product or the usage for the product.

Example -

<div style="text-align:center">

Description –   "Trunk Lid Lift Support"

Slang –   "Trunk shocks"

"Trunk supports"

"Trunk struts"

</div>

Best Practice *- Slang terminology for products can constantly grow and evolve, as well as varying from state to state, or even country to country. With that in mind, this description can and should be continually updated, growing as terms are found.*

UNS (80 Characters) UN/SPSC Description

The United Nations Standard Products and Services Code (UNSPSC) is a coding convention created for the international classification of products and services for Import and export.

The correct usage for this would be to utilize this description to deliver the established UN/SPSC Description for the relevant UN/SPSC Code sent in the ITEM Segment (B63).

Example – the UN/SPSC code "25172707" is used in the ITEM Segment to categorize the item. The corresponding UNS Description used to declare the product is"Vehicle Headlight"

VMR (80 Characters) VMRS Description

The VMRS (Vehicle Maintenance Reporting System) code is used primarily in the Heavy Duty truck service industry, and is a series of established codes that describe virtually every facet of the maintenance operation, from parts to manufacturers to technician work to vehicle location. This code system is used primarily in the Heavy Duty truck service industry.

The correct usage in the description would be to deliver the VMRS established description for the VMRS code conveyed in (B65) of the ITEM segment

Example - "013010194" is used in the ITEM Segment to identify the VMRS code relevant to the part. THE corresponding VMR description would be "Switch - Low Air Pressure"

ASM (2000 Characters) Application Summary

The ASM attribute enables users to provide a summary of the vehicle fitments or applications that the product will fit. This is different from what is delivered in the ACES specification, because it is textual, summary information only.

Best Practice*-*

It is best to provide a condensed summary of vehicle fitment, using commas or semicolons as delimiters between records.

Example –

"1995 thru 2002 Pontiac Trans Am",

"1987 and later Chevrolet 350 Engines"

Note *- Although this description can accommodate 2000 characters, it is not intended as a substitute of ACES application data, but to provide a quick and easy reference of fitment coverage.*

EXT (240 Characters) Product Description - Extended

The Extended Product Description was developed to deliver a further "in depth" level of the product description, conveying additional "lower level" product attributes and features that may not have been delivered prior with the (DES) "higher Level" of product description.

Since the development of the EXT and MKT Descriptions, the PIES standard has been expanded to deliver Form, Fit, Function and Performance – specific attributes through the Attribute segment, in conjunction with the Product Attribute Database (PAdb), a new library of industry-standard attributes. Common past practice was to deliver certain attributes in the EXT and MKT descriptions, and delimit statements using semicolons. The present 'Best Use' of both the EXT and MKT attributes is to provide 'publishable' paragraphs which summarize, in plain language, the key features of a product.

Example -

"All hardware included for installation. Self-lubricating sealed hinges insure easier movement. Marine grade vinyl is weather resistant and UV resistant. Storage dock holds up to 7 inch display."

Best Practice *- The PIES description segment provides the ability to "loop" data elements in your XML delivery. This feature gives the opportunity to deliver multiple renditions of the element, as well as providing additional character space for larger description deliveries. In the event that looping is being*

considered for a large sized description delivery for the Extended Product Content, a special consideration should be made to incorporate the description in its whole context within the larger (MKT) Marketing Description element.

MKT (2000 Characters) Marketing Description

The Marketing description is used to deliver product-specific supporting descriptive content that has been catered to the end consumer. This can be used to deliver higher and more robust levels of marketing content such as manufacturing technique, product history, product features and benefits, consumer reviews, or any other supporting product marketing content. The inclusion of "personal" content pertaining to the Manufacturer history or founding's should be avoided, as this type of content has an established delivery methods in other PIES elements delivered in the Market Copy Segment.

Best Practice *- Careful attention to the marketing copy should be made to remove references pertaining to specific pricing, competitive retailers, or other details that may insinuate the actions of the retailer.*

Example Phrases -

> *"Quality Products Priced Right"*

> *"100% Guarantee Or Your Money Back"*

Phrases to AVOID –

> *"The Best Alternator For Less Than 100 Dollars"*

> *"Now available at 123 Auto Parts and ABC Automotive"*

Companion Documents

There are a number of additional documents on the topic of Product Attributes which will help you create your PIES files. Visit www.aftermarket.org/Technology for more information.