

# A letter to manufacturers

*Distributors and dealers suggest ways to help streamline the sales pipeline and increase promotional and sales possibilities*

The following letter reflects the opinions of those undersigned.

With the large number of new hobby products being released, it has become increasingly difficult for sellers (distributors and retailers) to obtain the information required to promote, advertise and sell your products.

We are in need of your assistance and suggest the following general guidelines for all hobby manufacturers, the purpose of which are to simplify and streamline the order process for retailers as well as for wholesale distributors.

If your customers cannot locate or quickly identify your product, chances are it could be disregarded in the order process.

## Product identification

Keep your product (stock) numbers simple. Part numbers are a tool to identify one item. They are a tracking tool, not a product description. Do not use part numbers to describe or identify the products; additionally, do not use letters, dashes or symbols in your stock numbers. Using letters slows data processing when entering products and processing orders, leaving lots of room for errors. Five digits, for example, allow for any single manufacturer to have 99,999 individual products in their lineup.

Keep the product numbers as simple and as short as possible, and be sure that number is 12–14 point type or larger for easy identification; use black type on a white background, if possible. This number should appear on the small end of any box, or on the header of a bagged product.

## Product description

Along with the product number, a short description of the product should be

included on the box end or on the product header, if bagged. This is not an ad; it is product identification to go with the product number only. Keep the description only to what is necessary to identify the product or to differentiate from similar products.

## Manufacturer product lists

Product and price lists supplied by the manufacturer should include product numbers, descriptions, suggested retail price (if applicable), UPC/barcode and any sales program (discounts, freight policy, etc.) needed by the buyer to place orders with you. Photos of products will help identify and explain products even better.

The easier this process is for your customers, the more promotion your products will be given and the more often orders will be placed.

If you have a Web site, please be sure to include high-resolution photos identified by product number and suggested retail price, which can be copied and used for ads. Do not show lower suggested retail prices on your Web site than those you are quoting to your customers (more on this below).

## Promotion of your products by your customers

Your customers are generally more than willing to promote your products if you meet them halfway.

**Product Photos:** Digital photos should be available, identified by stock number and SRP, if any. Photos should be available in two different formats, if possible: JPEG or GIF (300–500 pixels wide) for Internet publishing, TIF (4" width, 300–400dpi) for paper publishing.

**Excel or tab-delimited text files of the product information:** Each line should be limited to a single product and include

the stock number/SKU, complete product descriptions, list price, cost and/or discount, UPC/barcode number, minimum order quantity and delivery date. Make this electronic information readily available on your Web site or upon request and linked to your product release e-mails.

If the stock numbers and the barcode numbers are not the same, keep a complete list (Excel or tab-delimited text file) on your Web site or on request showing the stock number matched to the barcode number.

PDF files are nice viewing files, but are harder to translate into usable forms for data processing.

## UPC/barcodes

Barcodes have become a necessity for product lines from all manufacturers, regardless of size. UPC/barcode equipment and software is readily available and relatively inexpensive, so that all but the tiniest manufacturer can afford to apply barcodes to their packaging. Request a registered bar code number online at [www.uc-council.org](http://www.uc-council.org). Use standard US (UPC-A) Formatting 5 & 5 plus check digits.

## Product information dissemination

Making all this electronic information readily available on your Web site and in your product release e-mails will allow the seller to better promote your products to the end consumer. This should increase your sales and marketplace recognition.

**Joe St. John, Hobbytime Distributors**  
**Michael Bass, Stevens International**  
**Dave Glatte, Heartland Hobby Wholesale**  
**Josh Emery, Emery Distributors**  
**Rich Deede, Portman Hobby Distributors**  
**Duane Miller, Caboose Hobbies**  
**Leroy & Sharon Prantle, PF&S Railway Supply**  
**Lee English, Bowser Manufacturing**