



VOLUNTARY INTERINDUSTRY  
COMMERCE STANDARDS

Voluntary Guidelines

for

**Communicating  
Vendor/Compliance Guide  
Changes**

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## Overview

The retail environment changes quickly and relies on information to leverage opportunities. Vendor/Compliance guides, developed by retailers, are an effective method of communicating the information needed by vendors and suppliers. These guidelines are intended to simplify the retrieval and understanding of changes or updates to these retail communications. We recognize the vast majority of retailers incorporate one or more of these practices in the publication and communication of their vendor/compliance guides today. These guidelines seek to standardize the types of information presented and not the method of presentation.

## Benefits

Enhances the ability of trading partners to communicate, understand, and respond to retail vendor/compliance guidelines.

## Important Considerations

### One Complete Printable Guide

Vendors and suppliers should be able to go to one place to get a complete set of the requirements for doing business with a retailer. Adobe Acrobat files (PDF) work well. Microsoft Word or WordPerfect documents are okay. However, we are trying to avoid the HTML-only guides found on the Internet which require several clicks to find all the parts. Those do not translate well to printing.

### Utilize a Table of Contents

Any reader of a Vendor/Compliance Guide should be able to go to a single location at the front of the guide that will direct them to the information they need. Hopefully, these specific recommendations will facilitate a de facto standard for the Table of Contents:

- *Contact information*: An individual or organization having primary responsibility for the creation and development of the information in the guide. If there is confusion, this clearly identifies retail, contact points that can forward issues to the appropriate party. Ideally, contact information, such as name, e-mail, and phone number, would be included in each section or in a separate, cover-all section for contacts.
- *Change Schedule and Change Frequency*: Announces when the publisher of the guide plans to revise the guide. This notifies the vendor and supplier community to review the guide before the changes are put in effect. This eliminates the need for constant review by the vendor or supplier and ensures changes or updates are not missed.
- *Summary of changes*: Provides those reviewing the guideline a single reference point, at the front of the guide, highlighting changes from the previous guide. Often, vendors and suppliers are forced to re-read an entire guide to find, what turns out to be, an esoteric change. The *Summary of Changes* is not to explain the change in detail, merely to point out where in the guide this change is located. The reader can then decide if it affects their business and can follow up appropriately. The summary of changes page should include:
  - The effective date,
  - Contact information, such as name, e-mail, and phone number, and

- The location of the page, including page, section number, paragraph, etc. in the guide.
- *New/Ongoing Initiatives*: In addition to minor refinements of policy, such as slight changes to minimum and maximum carton weights, there are larger initiatives that are introduced from time to time which require a significant process change to the retailer and/or the vendor and supplier community. Changes like these are rarely an afterthought and are often communicated in many channels over a long period. This is intended to announce and bring awareness to those types of initiatives. Since vendors and suppliers will review this common location, it will be a good way to promote early adoption of major initiatives.

### **Historical Archive of Previous Guides**

Retailers should make available on their web site, or to be ordered and delivered through the U. S. Mail when only a paper guide exists, previously published guides for referencing requirements that are no longer published in the current guide. The length of time these guides should be archived should reflect the amount of time the retailer may submit an offset notification for such a violation. For example, if the retailer reserves the right to review or audit records related to hanger requirements for two years from the date of receipt, the hanger rules from two years prior must be available to a vendor or supplier who may need to research such pre-existing requirements. The burden of archival is placed on the retailer because of the obvious amount of duplication required by the vendor and supplier community versus the retail community.

### **Effective Date of Change**

A reasonable amount of lead-time, relative to the complexity of the change and the capability of trading partners to execute the change, must be provided. A minimum 45 days should be considered as lead-time for any change.

### **Generic Email**

Both the retailer and the vendor or supplier should set up standard, generic, departmental e-mail addresses for distribution of time-sensitive changes. These e-mail addresses should be published in the Table of Contents. For example:

- [compliance@retailer/supplier.com](mailto:compliance@retailer/supplier.com),
- [routing@retailer/supplier.com](mailto:routing@retailer/supplier.com), or
- [edi@retailer/supplier.com](mailto:edi@retailer/supplier.com).