



# Ask An Expert

## Get Your Data in Shape

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As professional athletes and high-performance sports cars demonstrate every day, finely tuned systems are the key to amazing feats of power, strength, and agility. To perform at maximum capability, athletes, drivers, and their teams carefully monitor intake and how it impacts system function. On that basic level, supply chain management isn't all that different. But in this case, the Item Master requires the fine-tuning.

Item Master data is the foundation of supply chain management. From placing and managing orders, and compiling reports and analytics, to pricing, contracting, receiving, and controlling spend, your Item File determines your effectiveness. In fact, many financial losses in hospitals are directly due to an inaccurate Item Master.

Now, the reasons for an inaccurate Item Master are many. For instance, allowing too many people to make modifications or simple data entry errors that are made when updating the Item Master manually or electronically can cause inaccuracies. Other factors include items that may have been purchased outside of the Item Master, such as services, maintenance, and physician preference items. Additionally, Item Master data can be incomplete (missing fields such as catalog numbers), inaccurate (outdated/incorrect pricing), or contain items that are no longer actively used.

Like a dehydrated athlete or an engine running on dirty oil, a compromised Item Master creates performance problems, including generating inaccurate supply spend information, the inability to measure contract compliance and volume commitments with vendors, and missed opportunities to move to a better pricing tier or achieve rebates. "Dirty" Item Master data also makes it difficult—if not impossible—to accurately audit pricing and contracts against purchases, or to meet industry standards and changes such as GLN and GTIN standardization.

Therefore, your goal should be to make sure your data is clean data.

So, how do you improve your Item Master data quality? Commit to an Item Master cleanse. First, set roles and responsibilities. Assign a person with extensive product knowledge who can review and update the Item Master on a regular basis using defined policies and procedures. Then, create an approval hierarchy for all changes.

Once you've determined who is responsible for the Item Master, move to the how: implement data policies and procedures. This step includes creating a process for data input, updates, changes, reviews as well as seeking to minimize use of non-catalog items. Of course, you must also use and access accurate sources of data to update your Item Master. Ask your vendors and manufacturers to send you a current Item File based on your usage that includes full item detail, and ask your GPO for Item Master audits.

Now your Item Master should be clean—and the challenge of maintenance begins. Regularly validate and refresh the data in your Item Master. Create a standard nomenclature for all of the products you include. It will make reporting, analysis, and end-user searches much easier and more effective.

Most important, train your staff in how to follow the defined policies and procedures for data input, updates, changes, and reviews. And remain vigilant about what you put into your Item Master. Remember, regular maintenance is the key to staying in the winner's circle.

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