



THE GLOBAL LANGUAGE
OF BUSINESS

CASE STUDY

The screenshot shows the Dot Expressway search interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for 'HELP DESK (888) 435-2320', 'FAQ', 'EMAIL', 'LOGGED IN AS: JOHNDOE | SIGN OUT | MY ACCOUNT'. Below the navigation is the 'Dot Expressway' logo. To the right of the logo are buttons for 'SELECT CUSTOMER' and a search bar with placeholder text 'Search By Keywords, Brands, Suppliers, Item#, etc.' and a 'SEARCH' button. A sub-menu bar below the main navigation includes 'HOME', 'DASHBOARD', and 'DEALS'. Underneath the main search area, there's a section titled 'SEARCH WITHIN MY RESULTS' with a 'Keyword(s)' input field containing 'cheese', a search icon, and the text 'Results for "cheese"'. To the right of this is a count of '4728 ITEMS'. Below the search bar are filters for 'NARROW MY RESULTS' (Availability: Stock (2047), Special Order (2620)), 'SELECT ACTION FOR 0 ITEMS' (Simple or Expanded), and sorting options ('SORT BY RELEVANCE'). At the bottom of the search results area is a large blue banner with the text 'Dot Foods'.



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— CULLEN ANDREWS, Director of National Accounts, Dot Foods

National food redistributor uses quality data as expressway for growth

CHALLENGE

Dot Foods (Dot) introduced its online product catalogue—the Dot Expressway® (Expressway)—18 years ago to provide better search capabilities for its customers and sales representatives. With about 105,000 products from 700 suppliers, Dot wanted to fully leverage its market advantage by expanding and enhancing the Expressway with more complete and accurate product information.

SOLUTION

Dot launched a data quality initiative that transformed the Expressway to include expanded and validated data attributes. Dot suppliers publish core item attributes such as case dimensions and weights as well as marketing and nutritional information like ingredients, allergens and images through data pools that are then synchronized with Dot’s system via the Global Data Synchronization Network™ (GDSN®).

BENEFITS

Today, the Dot Expressway receives about 1.5 million hits per month from its users, including nearly 2,800 distributors and 310 national account operators. Distributor and Dot’s sales representatives use the Expressway when selling to customers for increased sales. With accurate data, Dot has reduced costs with improved warehouse management, load optimization and increased productivity.

Dot Foods is the nation's first and largest food industry redistributor, serving all 50 states and 25 countries from nine distribution centers. For more than 50 years, Dot has developed innovative solutions that not only benefit its own operations, but also those of its manufacturers, distributors and distributors' customers—foodservice operators ranging from small restaurants to large institutions.

In 1997, Dot introduced its online product catalogue called the Dot Expressway. "One of Dot's major advantages is our expansive product line from many different manufacturers with a lot of different applications," explains Cullen Andrews, director of National Accounts at Dot Foods. "Back then, we simply needed a searchable database of our products that included item numbers and product descriptions for quick look-ups."

Market demands have certainly changed during the past 18 years. Dot has kept pace by continuously enhancing the Expressway to become a highly useful tool for its users—primarily distributors, brokers and national account operators.

The Expressway contains approximately 105,000 products from 700 different suppliers with many search capabilities by product category, specific item and supplier, to name a few. "We're excited about the growing interest and use of the Expressway," says Andrews. "Nearly 2,800 of our distributors use the Expressway today with a 32 percent annualized growth rate in searches by national account operators in the last two years."

A major driver of the Expressway's popularity is the availability of complete and accurate product data. Dot's suppliers are publishing increasingly more product attributes via their data pools, using the GDSN for sharing and synchronizing this data with Dot.

Seventy (70) percent of all products in the Expressway have had core item information synchronized through the GDSN with the suppliers. More than half of those have marketing and nutritional data—compared to only 15 percent in 2011.

"Our suppliers have started to understand the power of quality data for making sales. While quality data can reduce costs, we have found it significantly increases sales," says Andrews. "We're seeing more and more activity on the Expressway, and quality data is a key reason for this growth—in usage and in sales."

In fact, Andrews reports that distributor sales representatives (DSRs)—nearly 4,000 from 671 distributor organizations—

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are using the Expressway to make on-the-spot sales with customers. "With all of the product data and images on the Expressway, the DSR can easily provide answers to a customer's questions, and then place the order on the Expressway," says Andrews.

Debbie Bower, director of eCommerce, points to another major benefit of quality data: reduced costs. "Poor data drives up everyone's cost in the supply chain, not just distribution. It is waste in the system that all stakeholders need to work on getting rid of," says Bower. "We literally load our trucks based on data we receive from suppliers through the GDSN. With accurate data, we're able to fill our trucks, which really adds up when driving over 100 million miles a year."

Efficiencies are also realized in warehouse management and associated labor costs. "If case heights are not accurate, productivity declines and costs increase. Supply chain costs like these impact everyone involved," explains Bower. "It is critical that we receive accurate product information from our suppliers in order to optimize the use of our warehouse space and reduce costs."

With years of experience, Dot recommends getting involved with the [Foodservice GS1 US Standards Initiative](#) for detailed advice and networking with others. Dot also advocates a data governance process to ensure and protect data integrity. Scorecards and frequent communications on the status of the initiative are also important to all involved.

"I think you have to stand on your soapbox, reinforcing the value of quality data for suppliers, distributors, foodservice operators and the consumer. At the end of the day, it's all about helping everyone's business grow and thrive," concludes Andrews.

To learn more about Dot Foods, visit www.dotfoods.com.

To learn more about the Foodservice GS1 US Standards Initiative, visit www.gs1us.org/foodservice.



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