During the IDEAlliance Logistics & Transportation conference in October 2009, a session was specifically dedicated to better understanding the business issues facing the newsstand industry and improvements that could be made. From the panel of wholesalers who participated, there was an overwhelming consensus that the introduction of the Advance Shipment Notice (ASN) would have an immediate impact on improving the process. As a result of this meeting, a task force was formed to explore the opportunities around implementing the ASN. The inaugural meeting of this task force occurred at the January 2010 Baltimore Postal meeting. Since January, on-going meetings have occurred with representation from wholesalers, national distributors, publishers and logistics/transportation companies.

**WHAT IS AN ASN?**

So what is an Advance Shipment Notice? An Advance Shipment Notice is a document that refers to a description of product that is on a truck, en route to a destination. The key point here is that the **truck is on the road**! The ASN specifies the contents, configuration and delivery information of the shipment. Depending on how the shipper and receiver wish to communicate, the ASN information can be supplied by using paper, email or in an electronic format.

**PROJECT PHASES**

The IDEAlliance ASN Project is divided into two phases. The first phase is designed to provide a quick win for the industry by saving time and money for wholesalers. In this phase, the working group defined and agreed upon the key data fields that make up an ASN. A Phase I Specification was then developed to document the fields and to provide a basis for industry testing. A critical component of the first phase will be to pilot test the ASN with a selected wholesaler and consolidator. This pilot test will provide further input so the specification can be finalized and rolled out.

It is important to note that Phase I simply involves the use of a standardized ASN form by all parties. This initial phase is viewed as a short-term solution and does not have the goal of developing the standard of electronically integrating shipper and wholesaler systems. Phase II of the ASN Project will look at the electronic transmission of the ASN data.

**ASN FORMS**

For the initial phase, a spreadsheet or form has been constructed to represent a standardized ASN. We have examined a number of forms and manifests used by shippers to communicate with wholesalers,
and from these have developed a set of two standard forms. If shippers can first standardize on the forms, moving forward at a later time with a computerized ASN will be a natural follow-on.

Three ASN Forms are provided with the specification. Those forms include:

- **Trailer Data** - Data about the trailer, scheduled shipment data and estimated arrival;
- **Magazine Data** - Data about all the magazines on the trailer; and
- **Pallet Data** - Optional data about the pallets on the trailer.

**BENEFITS OF THE ASN PHASE I**

The intended benefit from the ASN Phase I implementation is that wholesalers can cut costs and reduce handling time. Specifically:

- Pre-delivery shipment information will allow the magazine wholesaler to plan more effectively to receive the shipment. Knowing the exact product that is on the shipment, as well as the shipment date and arrival time, provides the wholesaler greater flexibility in scheduling labor and preparing outbound shipments.
- Early recognition of potential problems by comparing the ASN to the purchase order will allow the wholesaler to identify solutions prior to the shipment arriving.
- The ASN will identify for the wholesaler that a split shipment of a specific magazine is taking place. This will cut down on much of the confusion that exists today when a magazine is loaded on multiple trucks.
- When the ASN communication format between consolidator and wholesaler is standardized, the wholesaler can streamline its receiving process based on a single communication format.

As with most projects, testing is key before any rollout! The ASN project team recognizes this fact and is in the process of assembling a detailed pilot test plan. The project team wants to keep the momentum rolling with the ASN project. To this end, the ASN project team will have the pilot test plan completed, participants selected and a kick-off of the pilot test prior to the October 26 Logistics & Transportation Conference in New York City. If you have any questions or comments and/or would like to participate as a member of this project team, please contact Ted Uhlman at (610) 398-6870 or ted.uhlman@rodale.com.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ted Uhlman is director, distribution services, at Rodale, Inc., with responsibility for the distribution and transportation of all books and magazines for the direct, trade and newsstand businesses. The Rodale Distribution Center has been featured in “Modern Materials Handling Magazine” and was featured in the recent PBS Channel 39 segment on “Logistics in the Lehigh Valley Area.” Prior to joining Rodale, Uhlman served as director distribution systems at Lenox China. He holds a master’s degree from Drexel University and a bachelor’s degree in economics from Washington and Lee University. He serves on several industry committees, is co-chair of the IDEA Alliance Logistics Committee, vice President of the WERC Delaware Valley Council, and is a board member of the CSCMP Lehigh Valley Roundtable.