Parts numbering options create lively dialogue

Last month an interesting thread evolved on the Electrical Rebuilder's Association (ERA) website forum involving options for parts numbering. The "organic" opinions were diverse and made for some must-read conversation. If you're not a part of the ERA's online community, you are missing out on this and lots of other real-time technical information. Take time today to log in or go to electricalrebuilders.org and check it out.

Mark Melanson: Well, my boss is finally looking at renumbering our entire parts inventory. My question for you guys is what type of numbering systems are you all using? Our current numbering system has been in place for years. We use Wilson part numbers for everything. Years ago, this used to keep things simple, as 99 percent of our parts came from Wilson.

It's not simple anymore. These days, we're getting parts from at least four suppliers on a regular basis, and of course they all use different numbers. Converting everything over to Wilson numbers is becoming more and more of a pain, especially since Wilson doesn't even sell parts anymore. My boss is looking at switching everything to possibly WAI numbers or PIC numbers. Thoughts, concerns or questions are all welcome.

Poremba: Consider PIC, most up-to-date and correct. If you use PIC, don't make them up or you'll confuse everyone. Any time you require a PIC number Lester is more than accommodating, they have created many at my request for REGITAR. In some cases, stators we offer as example, I created our sales number by adding the letter R to the PIC stator number.

New fancy numbers can be exciting but the worst thing to happen, too many unanticipated problems. Back at IPM for example, we had a rebuilder competitor, ex-IPM, who built his whole system using our A,B,C 1,2,3 system. He ran into problems when he issued IPM style numbers which I never issued or had reserved for something else. Guys would get that number and go goofy trying to order it from us, as it looked like ours.

Be consistent whatever you do and remember, a part number doesn't have to mean a thing. It's merely a tracking device, nothing more and nothing less.

Jim Peoria: I would pick your major supplier and go with their numbering system as it will probably cross to the rest with relative ease. You may have to use several different systems actually, one for small parts and one for major components depending on who your major supplier is for those parts. Or scrap it all and make up your own numbering system. Why not? Every supplier in the world seems to think they have to reinvent the wheel with their own numbering system for stuff that came out of the manufacturer with perfectly good numbers on them. If they really need a system that fits their computer the least they could do would be to incorporate the OE number or the Lester number in their system. But why make anything simple in this world of chaos. Remove all traces of common sense and design another new system to totally confuse the rest of us struggling to survive.

Dean Conner: We tried the PIC numbers for our inventory but ran into many problems. When we are looking up part numbers we use WAI or J&N online catalogs. We were always having to go another step to convert these numbers to PIC numbers and our parts search got real confusing. We went back to the WAI numbers and many suppliers we deal with will convert a WAI number to theirs. I label with the WAI numbers and reference the PIC number, OEM number and J&N number on the shelf label for that part. Good luck. It is a pain switching over but it does make you more efficient!

Lestercat: Granted I have a vested interest in this but I would give serious consideration to using the PIC numbers. This is exactly what it was designed for. They are not tied to any specific vendor so you can buy it from whomever you like and use one system. In the Kwikfinder all of the vendors part numbers are shown for each unit and component part number so it's like having everyone's catalog in front of you. The numbers have meaning so you end up with like items next to each other on the shelf.

There was a time years ago that we were not all that great on component numbers but that has changed. Since WAI bought us a couple years ago we've added something like 3,000 components to the system and as Dan mentioned, can add more quickly if anyone has a need.

We have invested heavily in the next version of Kwikfinder.net which is due for release in a couple months. Once we do that we will be integrated with WAI's research department which buys thousands of OE samples and documents the units and their components. All that will now be part of the Kwikfinder.

Mark Melanson: All right, that looks like two votes for PIC and one for WAI (our major supplier now). I was leaning towards PIC, but since we don't subscribe to the Lester catalog at the moment, we would have to rely on our supplier's catalog cross references for the numbers. Maybe it's time we subscribed to Lester? Decisions, decisions.

Dean, I understand what you meant by the extra step in crossing things over to PIC numbers, as that's exactly what we're going through with our Wilson numbers now.

I'll wait on a few more replies to see what others might have to say.

I do have one question though. Since Lester is now owned by WAI, wouldn't you think they would both have/use the same part numbering system? That would make things REAL easy. Food for thought.

Poremba: WAI and Lester operate as two different companies, WAI sells parts, Lester sells information. There's a lot more numbers and information on Lester-PIC, whereas WAI limits its numbers to what it wants to offer.

Jerry: I am on my third set of numbers. For me it is easier to use numbers from my major vendors. I can't remember whose numbers came first, then Ace numbers (which seem to have no order whatsoever) and now WAI, the best system to date. I still stock drives by Accurate numbers because I am too old to relearn those. Everything is stocked by major groups (drives, bushings, end frames, etc.) and numeric from there. If you use the system your major vendor uses it makes life a lot easier when ordering or looking up parts. And using a major vendor's system are numbers most of their competitors will cross if you buy a particular part from

someone else because of quality or price.

Lestercat: I'm going to email you an explanation of what the PIC numbers mean so you can see how the numbers make sense. We also did not try to invent the wheel. The numbers after the dash are Accurate numbers for drives, Lester numbers for armatures and rotors, and so forth.

Also consider that there are many components that no suppliers offer but there is a PIC number for. Yes, it's going to cost you $295 per year but it's going to save you countless hours of work and will help you identify units and substitutions for units you might otherwise miss a sale on.

Jksstarter: When I expanded my shop a few years back and built a new parts room, I set everything up using PIC numbers and have been very pleased with the system and how it works. It is easy to explain to a new employee and easy to add new items to your existing inventory.

Schiroo: The first thing I suggest is that you buy Lester Kwikfinder. I figure that it saves me over one hour each week. In a month it's paid for. I use WAI numbers for most things; Lester for armatures, rotors, stators; Wilson for drives and solenoids. The problem for me has always been that no one vendor has a complete numbering system. Each vendor has their own niche. With Lester Kwikfinder, I have all numbers in front of me.

RayVanDervort: 391,000 part numbers linked to "filed by" 335,000 part numbers in our database.

How many PNs can you assign to 6-203-4? We have 46 different PNs linked and any one is searched and found and then the bin number is displayed. This, in my opinion, is the only way to do it.

Here is how it works: You need a "relational database" (we are now using Microsoft Access 2007). There is a master or parent table called MFG where Delco, WAI, etc., are listed. There is another master table called Bin, where all stock locations are filed. There are other master tables which we don't need to discuss.

The master or parent table has no parents. They serve as a control and linking of data. If Delco changes its name, I change one field from what it was to what it has become in the parent, and like recreating the genealogy of the world, wherever Delco was Delco, it becomes its new name with a five-second change.

If I change a bin name or want to move everything to a newly created bin from where it was, simply change the old name to the new location and move the parts physically. All database that was the old becomes the new.

So back to parts. How many PNs do you know for a given bearing or things like a 1/4"-20 nut of a certain design? We have two linked tables for the part numbers. In this table structure, the master tables have no parents, the children of the parent master tables each have a relation to the master table, the children can each have their own children.

MFG > Filed by part has a MFG
MFG > Unit taken in for repair
MFG > A lawn mower we repair
MFG > has an address

Filed by a PN > Has Other PNs we know it by
> These other PNs have a MFG
Each address > has people we known
Each person > has characteristics

I hope I am helping you get some idea of the basics. The data in our database has gone through five or six different databases over the years, making improvements along the way and each major change, we managed to transport the data.

This one database has grown to handle parts, some accounting, people, documents, images, test data, mfg., warranty, statements, invoices, rebuild data, small engine work orders, aviation rotables repair and documentation, correspondence, and more for small engine work, outdoor power equipment repairs, outboard repairs, electric rebuilding, website links and passwords, reference materials of all types. Serial numbering of selected parts and more.

Bottom line on parts, if they are equal, who cares whose PN you use? Just find it and put equal parts in the same place with somebody's PN on it. On the paperwork, put somebody's part number on it to subtract from stock, when you buy it, who has a part number for it and what is that part number and who else might know what it is or have one.

There is a free smaller software package I hear is good enough for small applications: search for OpenOffice.org. I believe the database is relational.

Mark Melanson: Thanks again for the info guys. We definitely have some thinking to do before we decide to make this change. I appreciate the info on using Access also. I "played" around with it years ago, but not enough to be comfortable with it. Our current software package, although not ideal, does a pretty good job of what we need it to do. Therefore, I was looking for a way to avoid creating/maintaining another database.

I took a sample of our current inventory numbers the other day and tried converting them to both WAI and PIC numbers. After I had them all crossed, I went back, as though I would be crossing FROM both WAI and PIC numbers with some of my suppliers. Some PIC numbers didn't cross directly with some suppliers, and some WAI numbers didn't cross, although not the same ones. It was pretty much a 50/50 split. That experiment didn't help much, other than to show us that no one numbering system is going to solve all of our problems.

Once again, if we used Lester, I don't think this would be as much of an issue, as all of the suppliers' cross references would be visible when we brought up the PIC number.

The biggest issue is when our system generates a purchase order to a supplier, using our stocking numbers (which would be PIC). Our suppliers are then going to need to cross all of those numbers over. This is most likely going to lead to some "mistakes" along the way.

Lestercat: I'm not sure how you did that comparison since you don't subscribe to Kwikfinder. My guess is you probably used one of the slimmed down versions available on some suppliers' sites. In that case you would not be getting all the numbers as these free versions are tailored to the products that the particular supplier offers and is a small subset of our database.

I think we've pretty much beat this to death. Press the "Easy Button." Use PIC.

SPU2: Hands down it's Lester Kwikfinder for us. Can't quite remember how we got along before it. The one yearly payment that we can say is well worth it. Even if you don't use it for your numbering system it's worth the price.

RayVanDervort: One thing I believed

was helpful came to mind as I read another post saying Lester-PIC is information and WAI is a number for what they hope to sell. In our database, it may not matter as I tie it all together to link them, but the "filed by" PN I try to use the OEM most prevalent number as the filed by PN to link the others to. Does it matter if you try to tie yourself to a particular numbering system like PIC? I say no. In fact, you will find parts for which they do not have a PN and in fact you already probably have some items for which you could not find any part number. I do have such items and may assign a PN like Lester number-nose. Later I may find a PN and simply link it together.

The points here are I believe most suppliers' mistakes (and yours) will be minimized by using the OEM number. The second point is maybe that should be your numbering system, if you're not going to link a bunch of PNs together.

ERE