

WHITE PAPER V: 1.0 JUNE 2021

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With advice from EDA Data Quality Working Group

Creating Excellent Product Descriptions:

Guidance & Best Practice for Ecommerce





This is the fourth in our series of white papers aimed at EDA members and affiliates embarking on the path of digital transformation. The series is designed to explain topics related to digitalisation in a way that is easy to digest and relevant to the electrotechnical sector.

In this paper Richard Appleton and Javier Garcia, who share many years' experience working with product data, offer detailed guidance on one of the most important elements of a manufacturer's product data: how to write high quality, ecommerce-friendly product descriptions.

Acknowledgements

This white paper was produced with the help of the EDA's Data Quality Working Group. The EDA is grateful to the members of the group and anyone else who has contributed to the creation of this white paper:

Dave Bate	BMF
George Brickwood	Schneider Electric Ltd
Matt Burton	Signify (Philips Lighting)
Nick Hayler	Marshall-Tufflex Ltd
Phil Thompson	NG Bailey
Steve Mortlock	CEF
Stuart Squires	Comma Group

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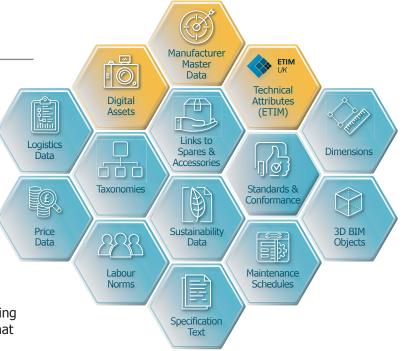


Introduction

This paper takes a more in depth look at one of the most important aspects of product data: the product description. This includes the standard ecommerce-friendly Short Description, the Long Description and Marketing Bullets.

The paper is aimed primarily at manufacturers of electrotechnical products, and the main focus is on creating product descriptions for use in ecommerce and other supply chain applications. It will, therefore, be of particular interest to manufacturers that are distributing their product data via EDATA. However much of the paper is of equal relevance to manufacturers in the HVAC, plumbing and building sectors as well as to wholesalers and merchants that are managing their own product data.

Our objectives are to support manufacturers in responding to the data needs of the supply chain, to drive product data quality and best practice in the sector, and to provide a basis for EDATA data quality measures.



customers claim to have returned a product due to a mistake in, or lack of, product data.



Best Practice

There is no definitive right and wrong way to create product descriptions. This paper outlines what we consider to be best practice but is deliberately not overprescriptive, recognising that many in the industry are still at an early stage in their product data journey.

We anticipate that these guidelines will be further refined in future based on feedback and experience from the industry.

Your feedback

Creating excellent product descriptions is not an exact science and is an evolving subject. If you have a question or a point that you'd like to share, please get in touch on info@eda.org.uk Your insights are most welcome.





Who, Where and Why?

It is important to understand who will be using the product descriptions you create and in what context.

Who are the product descriptions for?

Your product descriptions may be published on a wholesaler's web site, but the ultimate audience is the wholesaler's customer, the person who wants to buy your product. Most likely this will be a contractor, installer or specifier, looking for a product that conforms to a particular specification or serves a specific purpose.

Write your product descriptions for those customers. Find out what they need to know, then make your product descriptions work with the other elements of your product data to provide the information they need.

Where will the product descriptions be used?

There are numerous organisations who may require your product data and applications where it may be used. These include wholesalers' web sites, click and collect apps, your own web site, contractors' ERP and estimating systems.

Try to identify them and consider both the technical requirements (where possible) and the information requirements of each type of organisation and application. This subject is covered in more detail in the previous EDA white paper 'Creating a Product Data Strategy: A Seven Point Plan for Manufacturers' (see Appendix B).

Why invest in creating good quality product descriptions?

Creating good quality product data takes time and resources but, in the digital world, investment in creating excellent product data results in a valuable business asset with multiple benefits:

- Product data is your silent sales team. Your products are competing for attention in search engines and on web sites. Good quality descriptions help your customers find and select your products.
- Good quality product data improves customer service by helping customers find the right product and by reducing purchasing errors and returns.
- If you provide excellent product descriptions, there is less likelihood of them being edited by wholesalers and other users, giving you greater control over product presentation and branding.

In this paper we quote a number of statistics taken from on-line sources. Studies vary widely and these cannot be taken as definitive but they do demonstrate the effect on customers of poor product content.



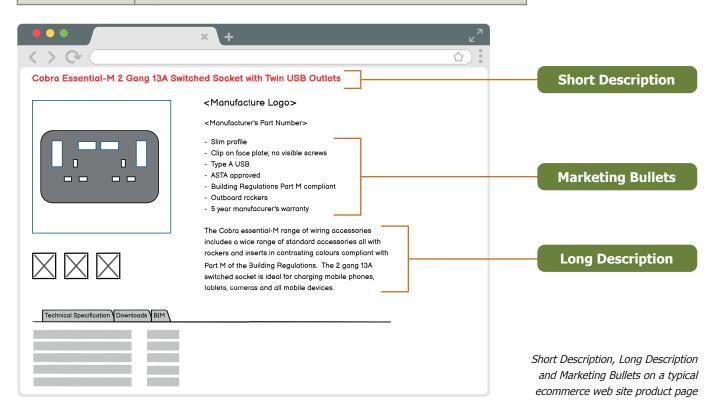
Types of Product Description

In ecommerce and other trading applications, the following are the highest priority and are those discussed in this paper.

Many other types of product description may be encountered including: Catalogue Description, Specification Text, Mobile-friendly Description, Till Receipt Description.

Subject to interest, these may be discussed in a future paper.

Description Type	Definition
Short Description	 Also known as the Product Name or Product Title This is the standard short description that identifies products on an ecommerce site. The first description seen by a customer on a search results page and at the head of a product page.
Long Description	A longer text description Normally found on the product page of a web site.
Marketing Bullets	 Also known as Feature-Benefit Bullets Key features and benefits of a product laid out in easy-to-read bullet points Normally found on the product page of a web site.
ERP Description	Also known as the Invoice Description Very short description used in ERP and other business systems and for including in trading messages (Purchase Order, Invoice, GRN etc.)



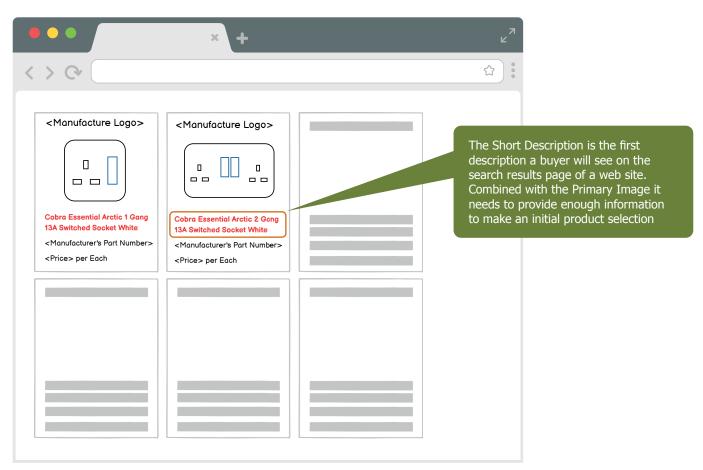


Short Descriptions – Guidelines & Best Practice

Overview

Also known as the Product Name or Product Title, this is the most important description in an ecommerce environment and is normally the first description a customer will see, e.g. on the search results page of a web site.

The Short Description, combined with the Primary Image, needs to provide enough information for a customer to make an initial product selection, either to purchase the product or to investigate it in more detail.



Short Description on a typical ecommerce web site search results page



Length

- The required length varies between platforms. EDATA aligns with both Google and the BMEcat® data exchange format, allowing a maximum of 150 characters.
- It is not mandatory to fill all 150 characters, 60-80 characters is probably optimal. Not all platforms can accommodate 150 characters and clarity is more important.

Contents

- The Short Description should accurately describe the product in plain English.
- Every short description within your range should be unique.
- Do include key features see examples in Appendix A.
- The Short Description should state what the product actually is i.e. Cable, Lamp, Luminaire etc. Don't assume that customers will infer this from the rest of the description e.g.:

6491B 2.5mm LSOH Single Core Cable Brown Not: 6491B 2.5mm LSOH Single Core Brown Not: 5W GU10 Non-Dimmable LED 4000K 5W GU10 Non-Dimmable LED Lamp 4000K

- Don't assume buyers will know your part numbers. The Short Description should contain enough detail to identify the correct product unambiguously.
- Do include your brand name and/or product family or range name.
- Don't include your full manufacturer name or your manufacturer part number.
- Don't include price information or special offers.
- Don't include subjective or promotional phrases such as "Quick to install" or "Best Seller".





Style

• The style should be consistent in terms of content, sequence, terminology etc. Agree, and stick to a structure, e.g.:

Brand Name > Family Name > Range > Key Features > Product Name > **Key Features** > Size (dimensions) > Colour > Pack Size/Quantity

- Consistency should be maintained across similar products, but the structure may vary according to the type of product - see Appendix A for product specific examples.
- Where you have a number of similar products, it makes sense to show the primary differentiator (e.g. colour) at the end of the short description where it is easier to see.

13W 230V 82mm Dia. Adjustable GU10 Downlight Chrome

13W 230V 82mm Dia. Adjustable GU10 Downlight Polished Brass

13W 230V 82mm Dia. Adjustable GU10 Downlight White

- Standard abbreviations should be used for units of measure e.g. V, A, mm etc.
- Standard abbreviations should be used elsewhere only if they are commonly understood in the sector e.g. LED, MCB, RCCB, PVC. Otherwise abbreviations should be avoided.
- Use only necessary punctuation. It is not necessary to separate each element of the short description with commas or hyphens.

It is accepted practice, though not essential, to use hyphens to join certain attributes to aid clarity e.g. 2-Pole, Type-C.

- Numbers should be shown as numerals i.e. 3, not three.
- Avoid special characters or symbols e.g. © ® ™ £
- ° (degrees) is acceptable, as are superscript ² (square) or 3 (cube).
- Use Title Case, where the first letter of each major word is capitalised. This can easily be converted to Upper Case or Sentence Case by the recipient if required.

formation



Dimensions

- Metric lengths are normally shown in millimetres (e.g. 600mm, 1275mm). For whole metre lengths of 1m and above use metres (e.g. 1m, 3m, 6m).
- Show the unit after each figure and avoid crushing dimensions by removing spaces: 25mm x 12mm x 2m is preferable to 25x12mmx2m
- The normal sequence is Width x Height x Length. In practice this may vary for different types of product.

Packaging Details

• If the sales unit (SKU) is a pack containing multiple individual items, then include the pack quantity in brackets at the end of the Short Description.

Countersunk Slot Head Brass Woodscrew M8 x 1.5" (Box of 100)

20S M20 CW Brass Cable Gland Kit (Pack of 2)

• If the same product is available in a choice of packaging, then include details in the short description.

5W GU10 Non-Dimmable LED Lamp 4000K (Boxed)

5W GU10 Non-Dimmable LED Lamp 4000K (Bubble Pack)

• For cable, include the reel or drum size or, for cut to length products, specify "Cut to Length" or "Per Metre".

2.5mm 6491B LSOH Single Core Cable Brown 100m Reel

35mm 6491B LSOH Single Core Cable Green/Yellow (Cut to Length)



In Future Trends: Auto-creation of Product Descriptions

Some Product Information Management (PIM) systems enable descriptions to be auto-created by concatenating individual attributes. Generally the resulting descriptions are not customer friendly and at present we don't recommend this approach.

Wholesalers and buyers would like consistency across brands, however, and auto-creation is the way to achieve this. In the future the availability of better attribute data (such as that based on ETIM), combined with industryagreed templates and AI powered natural language generation (NLG) software will result in better quality auto-created descriptions.



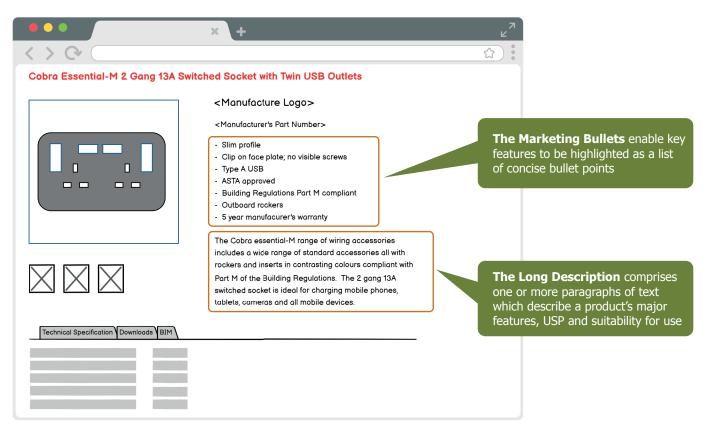
Long Descriptions & Marketing Bullets Guidelines & Best Practice

Overview

The Long Description and Marketing Bullets, also known as Feature-Benefit Bullets, enable you to provide more detail about a product's key features, USP and suitability for use.

Both will normally be displayed on a page specific to the product and not be seen until a buyer has selected the product (based on the Short Description and Primary Image) for further investigation. The job of the Long Description and Marketing Bullets is to help the user confirm their initial selection or enable a more informed comparison of similar products.

They are not intended to provide a full technical specification which is better provided in tabular form using a structure for technical attributes such as ETIM or on a product data sheet.



Long Description and Marketing Bullets on a typical ecommerce web site product page



Long Description

- The Long Description comprises one or more paragraphs of text which describes the major features, USP, suitability for use and benefits of a product.
- The length allowable varies between platforms. EDATA allows a maximum of 1500 characters.
- Rather than relating purely to an individual SKU, it is frequently used to describe a range of related products, so all products in that range will share the same Long Description.
- The Long Description should be easy to read, written in correctly punctuated and paragraphed plain English. It should not be simply a concatenation of the Marketing Bullets.
- Use sentence case (where the first letter of each sentence is capitalised)
- The Long Description should be restricted to text. Avoid including graphics, HTML, web site links etc. which may not be compatible with all platforms.

Marketing Bullets

- Also known as Feature-Benefit Bullets, the Marketing Bullets enable you to list key features and benefits in a list of concise bullet points. Not all customers will read long paragraphs and it is easier to scan a set of bullet points to spot a key requirement.
- The number of Marketing Bullets allowed per product, and their length, varies from platform to platform. EDATA allows up to 10 Marketing Bullets per product, each with a maximum length of 255 characters.
- The Marketing Bullets should grab a customer's attention. Keep them concise (less is more) and specific. Don't feel you have to fill all the available space - up to 80 characters is probably optimal.
- Use sentence case (where the first letter of each sentence is capitalised).
- Punctuate correctly and separate clauses or sections using a semi-colon; do not include end punctuation.
- If you are also providing structured technical attribute data, such as ETIM there is no need to repeat ETIM features in the Marketing Bullets unless they represent a key USP or differentiator. If there is duplication, ensure that the two are consistent.
- The Marketing Bullets should be restricted to text. Avoid including graphics, HTML, web site links etc. which may not be compatible with all platforms.
- Some of the subjects which may be highlighted using the Marketing Bullets are listed overleaf:



Feature, Benefit or USP Type	Examples
Compliance with BS, EN or ISO standards	• Fire resistant to BS EN 1363: Part 2 • Kitemarked to BS EN 14604:2005
Other standards & conformances	Part M compliant LUL (London Underground Ltd) approved
Components	Includes fixing screws and wall plugs Supplied with lamp
Suitability	Suitable for ceiling, panel or wall mounting Suitable for use with <manufacturer's number="" part=""></manufacturer's>
Energy saving & environmental	Saves up to 78% energy when used as replacement for HQL lamp Maximum noise level 17 dB(A) Contains 70% recycled PVC-U
Safety characteristics	Antimicrobial certified material
Technological innovation	Set up and control through the app via Bluetooth
Durability	Tough exterior provides IP65 and IK08 protection
Installation & maintenance	Stainless steel clips allow easy removal of diffuser Removable impeller; allows for easy cleaning and replacement
Warranty	• 25 year warranty

Table showing subjects suitable for listing as Marketing Bullets

Marketing Integrity

In the construction sector, the results of selecting an unsuitable product can be expensive and potentially catastrophic. Manufacturers must balance the need to promote and sell their products alongside providing accurate information to buyers and specifiers.

Great care should be taken to ensure that product descriptions never contain any inaccurate, ambiguous or misleading claims relating to the suitability, specification, performance or safety of a product.

In addition it is good practice to avoid making vague or unsubstantiated claims such as "Quick to install" or "Easy to maintain". Where possible, provide evidence to back up any claim: "Up to 30% installation time savings shown in independent tests carried out by BSRIA" conveys a far more credible message than "Quick to install" and will reflect well on your brand.



Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Descriptions

ERP is an abbreviation for Enterprise Resource Planning. In practice the term is used for any general business system comprising sales and purchase order processing, stock control and accounts. Sometimes called Invoice Descriptions, the ERP Description is a very short description held in the manufacturer's ERP system. It is primarily used to drive commercial processes and is used in trading documents (both printed and electronic) such as purchase orders, invoices, GRNs, picking lists etc. and may also be used on product labels where space is restricted.

- ERP Descriptions tend to be short: 30 or, at most, 40 characters. EDATA allows up to 40 characters.
- As far as is practical, the ERP Description should follow the same rules relating to content and style as the Short Description.
- The length of the ERP description requires the use of abbreviations for key terms. Try to keep these consistent across your range: a house style guide will help.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

While it is up to individual wholesalers to manage SEO on their sites, manufacturers can improve search results for their products (both in search engines and in some web sites) by researching popular search terms and including them as keywords. Tools such as Google Keyword Planner or Spyfu are available to help with keyword research.

However, we recommend this activity is kept in perspective. Don't reduce the clarity of your Short Description by focussing on keywords, it is better to include them in the Long Description or Marketing Bullets. But, even in those, avoid reducing clarity by stuffing the text with keywords.

A manufacturer's product descriptions may be displayed on many wholesalers' web sites and some wholesalers will rewrite them in the belief that Google penalises duplicate content by awarding lower rankings. Few are really familiar with the details of Google's algorithms, but it is now widely accepted that duplicated technical data is inevitable and will not be penalised. Furthermore, there is a danger that rewritten descriptions, while unique, may no longer accurately represent the product. Wholesalers' time is probably better spent optimising other aspects of their web sites.



M Future Trends: Voice Commerce

Voice commerce is an emerging technology which enables customers to search for and purchase products on-line using voice commands. In consumer markets the proportion of products purchased using a digital assistant e.g. Apple Siri, Google Assistant; Amazon Alexa is still relatively small but is growing. If this continues it will inevitably start to spill over into B2B purchasing.

Voice commerce depends on the device's ability to "understand" the customer's request. Clear, optimised product descriptions are critical to success.



Appendix A: Example Short Descriptions

Example short descriptions for a selection of major product types are listed below. The colour coded key can be used to identify the various elements of the description and how they fit together to create a Short Description which follows best practice.

Brand Name > Family Name > Range > Key Features > Product Name > Key Features > Size (dimensions) > Colour > Pack Size/Quantity

1. Cable

a. Twin & Earth

EZCable H62342B 2.5mm² LSOH Twin and Earth Cable 300/500V Grey 500m Reel EZCable H62342B 2.5mm² LSOH Twin and Earth Cable 300/500V Grey 100m Reel EZCable H62342B 2.5mm² LSOH Twin and Earth Cable 300/500V White 100m Reel EZCable H62342B 1.5mm² LSOH Twin and Earth Cable 300/500V White (Per Metre)

b. Fire Performance

EZCable FirePro 1.5mm² 4-Core+Earth Enhanced Fire Cable Red 100m Reel EZCable FirePro 2.5mm² 2-Core+Earth Enhanced Fire Cable Black 100m Reel

c. Data & Comms

EZCable Cat6 UTP PVC Solid Cable Grey 305m Box EZCable Cat6 UTP LSOH Patch Cable Blue 100m Reel

d. Panel Wire

EZCable 2.5mm² Tri-Rated Cable Green/Yellow 500m Reel EZCable 0.75mm² Tri-Rated Cable Orange 100m Reel



2. Cable Management & Accessories

a. Cable Ties

Sapko Nevada Stainless Steel Cable Ties 100mm x 2.5mm (Pack of 100)

Sapko Nevada Stainless Steel Cable Ties 200mm x 4.6mm (Pack of 100)

Sapko Nevada Plastic Cable Ties 100mm x 2.5mm Black (Pack of 100)

Sapko Nevada Plastic Cable Ties 200mm x 4.6mm White (Pack of 100)

b. Cable Clips

Sapko Round Cable Clips 6-7mm Black (Tub of 500)

Sapko Flat Cable Clips 4-6mm Grey (Tub of 500)

Sapko Cable Clips for Coaxial Cable 10mm Black (Pack of 100)

Sapko Fire Performance Cable Clips 1-2.5mm Red (Pack of 100)

c. Cable Glands

Sapko M20 IP68 Compression Gland White (Pack of 10)

Sapko M20 IP68 Compression Gland with Locknut Black

Sapko 20S M20 CW Brass Cable Gland Kit (Pack of 2)

d. Conduit

Sapko 25mm Heavy Gauge Round PVC Conduit White 3m

Sapko 20mm Pre-Galvanised Steel Conduit 3m

Sapko 25mm PVC Coated Steel Conduit 50m

e. Trunking

Sapko Galvanised Steel Trunking 50mm x 50mm 3m

Sapko Galvanised Steel Trunking 100mm x 50mm 3m

Sapko PVC Mini Trunking 25mm x 16mm White 3m

Sapko 3 Compartment PVC Dado Trunking 170mm x 50mm Grey 3m



Brand Name > Family Name > Range > Key Features > Product Name > Key Features > Size (dimensions) > Colour > Pack Size/Quantity



3. Wiring Devices

a. White Moulded

Cobra Essential Arctic 2 Gang 13A Switched Socket White Cobra Essential Arctic 2 Gang 2 Pole 13A Switched Socket White Cobra Essential Arctic 3 Gang 2 Way 10A Way Light Switch White Cobra Essential Arctic 1 Gang 13A Switched Socket with Twin USB Outlets White

b. Weatherproof / Outdoor

Cobra 2 Gang 2 Pole 13A Weatherproof Switched Socket IP66 Black Cobra 1 Gang 13A Weatherproof Switched Socket IP66 White Cobra 2 Gang 13A Weatherproof Switched Socket IP65 Grey

c. Back Boxes

Cobra Essential 2 Gang 47mm Square Corners PVC Surface Box White Cobra Essential 2 Gang 32mm Square Corners PVC Surface Box with 20mm Knockouts White Cobra Essential 2 Gang 38mm Surface Mount Metal Back Box with 8 x 20mm Knockouts Grey

4. Distribution, Switchgear and Protection

a. Circuit Breakers

Genius Fat8 iK20M 1-Pole + Neutral 32A Type-C RCCB Genius Fat8 iK20M 1-Pole + Neutral 20A Type-C RCCB Genius Fat8 iK20M 3-Pole 32A Type-C MCB 10/30/15kA

b. Distribution Boards

Genius Link9 6 Way 125A SP+N Type A Metal Clad Distribution Board without Incomer Genius Link9 4 Way 250A 3P+N Type B Metal Clad Distribution Board without Incomer Genius Link9 18 + 4 Way 125A 3P+N Type B Split Metered Metal Clad Distribution Board with Incomer

c. Consumer Units

Genius Kong Core 6 + 6 Way Dual 100A RCD Metal Clad Consumer Unit Genius Kong Core 6 + 4 Way Empty Metal Clad Consumer Unit Genius Kong Core 10 Way Flexible Dual 63A RCD Metal Clad Consumer Unit



Brand Name > Family Name > Range > Key Features > Product Name > Key Features > Size (dimensions) > Colour > Pack Size/Quantity



5. Lighting

a. LED Lamps

AA Lighting Economy 3W GU10 Dimmable LED Lamp 4000K 230lm AA Lighting Economy 3W E27 Dimmable LED Lamp 4000K 230lm AA Lighting Economy 5W GU10 Dimmable LED Lamp 3000K 365lm

AA Lighting Economy 5W E27 Dimmable LED Lamp 3000K 365lm

b. Smart Lamps

AA Lighting 5W GU10 LED RGBW Smart Lamp 2700-6000K 420lm AA Lighting 9W BC LED RGBW Smart GLS Lamp 2700-6000K 800lm

c. Fluorescent Tubes

AA Lighting 18W T8 2ft High Efficiency Fluorescent Tube 4000K AA Lighting 58W T8 5ft Shatterproof Fluorescent Tube 2700K

d. High Intensity Discharge (HID) Lamps

AA Lighting 70W G12 Metal Halide Ceramic Lamp 3000K 7000lm AA Lighting 70W G12 Metal Halide Ceramic Lamp 4200K 6600lm

e. Other Lamps

AA Lighting 15W E14 Tubular Oven Lamp 240V AA Lighting 25W E14 Tubular Cooker Hood Lamp 240V

f. Downlights

Elk Armour 5W LED Dimmable Fire Rated Downlight 4000K White Elk Armour 9W LED Dimmable Fire Rated Downlight 4000K without Bezel

g. Battens

Elk 1 x 36W 4ft T8 Fluorescent High Frequency Batten 4000K Elk 2 x 70W 6ft T8 Fluorescent High Frequency Batten 4000K AA Lighting 20W 2ft LED Batten 4000K AA Lighting 40W 5ft LED Batten 4000K

KEY

Brand Name > Family Name > Range > Key Features > Product Name > Key Features > Size (dimensions) > Colour > Pack Size/Quantity



h. Bulkheads

Elk Professional 13W IP20 LED Bulkhead 5000K 1200lm White

Elk Professional 13W IP20 Emergency LED Bulkhead 5000K 1200lm White

Elk Professional 13W IP67 LED Bulkhead 5000K 1200lm White

Elk Professional 15W IP20 LED Bulkhead 5000K 2250lm Black

Elk Professional 15W IP20 Emergency LED Bulkhead 5000K 2250lm Black

Elk Professional 15W IP67 LED Bulkhead 5000K 2250lm Black

i. Emergency Exit Boxes

A&E 5W LED Emergency Maintained Exit Box with Arrow Up Legend

j. PIR Sensors

A&E 140° Standalone PIR Sensor IP44 Black

6. HVAC Equipment & Controls

a. Heaters

HeatPlanet Comfort 1kW Slimline Electric Panel Heater White

HeatPlanet Comfort 1kW Digital Electric Panel Heater White

HeatPlanet Comfort 1.5 kW Electric Panel Heater with Timer White

HeatPlanet 2.4kW 5l Instant Boiling Water Heater

HeatPlanet 3kW 10l Multi Outlet Unvented Water Heater

b. Ventilation

AEC Commercial 41W 230mm 9" Wall or Ceiling Fan Automatic White

AEC C-Sec 20W 100mm 4" Axial Fan White

AEC C-Sec Silent 8W 100mm 4" Axial Fan with Timer White



Brand Name > Family Name > Range > Key Features > Product Name > Key Features > Size (dimensions) > Colour > Pack Size/Quantity

Note: All brand, family and range names are fictitious and any resemblance to genuine brands is entirely unintentional.





If you would like further information, or to discuss how to list your products in EDATA or integrate EDATA into your ecommerce web site, please contact the EDA on 020 3141 7350.

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Appendix B: Useful Links & References

Amazon Product Title Requirements

https://tinyurl.com/Amazon-titles

Amazon Seller Product Page Style Guide

https://tinyurl.com/Amazon-seller-style-guide

BMEcat Data Exchange Format Guidelines

https://www.etim-international.com and filter BMEcat guidelines in the Downloads section or follow this link https://tinyurl.com/BMEcat-format

Electrical Distributors' Association

www.eda.org.uk

Google Merchant Center: Product Data Specification

https://tinyurl.com/Google-merchants



WHITE PAPER



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