Once upon a time, syndicated data providers were the main source of retail POS data, and what was available was limited and extremely expensive. But times have changed, with richer, more detailed demand data becoming available from more and more sources: syndicated data providers, brokers, third party data managers, and increasingly, retailers themselves — usually for free.

But not all consumer goods (CG) companies are aware of who's sharing and what's available — even from their own customers. While it's true that few retailers share data on the level of Walmart with its Retail Link® portal, more and more are grasping the benefits of enabling their suppliers to access store-level sales and inventory information in virtually real time, and taking steps to make it more available.

Store-level demand sensing is the fuel that fires a responsive, profit-enhancing CG demand chain. The ultimate goal is a robust analytics solution that drives actionable business decisions, from supply and demand management through sales and marketing. More and more CG companies are recognizing the need to maximize their access to retailer data to attain this ideal state.

A SHORT HISTORY OF RETAIL DATA SHARING
Data sharing gained a major enabler with the development of the EDI 852 product activity data transaction in the 1980s. However, CGs have been challenged with keeping up with individual retailers’ interpretation of the standard, which can vary widely. Purchasing syndicated data has long been standard practice, offering suppliers high-level retailer data such as sales volume and market share, yet it was — and still is — devoid of any inventory measures. In the early 90s, the data sharing concept expanded with retail's Efficient Consumer Response (ECR) initiative as well as the debut of Walmart's Retail Link, which triggered the beginning of the analytics era. As the new century turned, more retailers outside the mass merchandising pioneers began moving to direct data sharing.

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