



# Nothing to Fear: How Contributing to the NTCR Isn't Complicated

Generally speaking, people are uncomfortable with the unknown, if not afraid. Changing routines can be an intimidating task for some. This does not exclude the concept of sharing tradeline data with businesses or organizations that offer trade credit reports, like the National Association of Credit Management (NACM).

But, at least in the case of NACM's National Trade Credit Report (NTCR), more and more members are finding out the process of sharing really isn't as difficult, risky or rigid as many may have perceived...far from it actually.

"It's really one of the simpler tasks I perform monthly," said Tamara Watkins, district credit manager with Mayer Electric Supply Co., Inc. "It takes me longer to name the files and send to the agencies than it does to actually pull the report and download everything."

She added that, all told, the actual time it takes her to contribute to the NTCR can best be measured in minutes, not hours. And while easy, the process may not be obvious to a newcomer. "We had been asked a lot, 'How do we do it?'" said Jennifer Walsh, CBA, president of NACM Inland Northwest. "I can see the momentum of interest of people wanting to share really increasing; people are starting to get a lot more comfortable with it. It's not as painful as some used to think."

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## How Mayer Electric and Others Submit Tradeline Data to the NTCR

Once the month is closed and processed, reports are generated and the information is downloaded for the credit trade tape information. Watkins generates her reports on the first day of the month and downloads them to an Excel spreadsheet. After very few exceptions are pulled out of the report, the file is saved as a CSV file (Watkins noted that it can be saved in whatever format the agency receiving the reports requires). At that point,



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the files are sent off by email. In Watkins' case, she sends her information via email to NACM-SE (Southeast Unit, based in Atlanta) and NACM South Atlantic (which covers Orlando, the Carolinas and Northern Virginia). Watkins said she then gets a confirmation or a bounce-back message that the information was received and "will be loaded." And that's pretty much the end of what, once you set it up for the first time, is a very easy process. "If you can operate an Excel spreadsheet and email, you can do this. It doesn't really require things you don't already do," she said.

Angela Duncan, CCE, credit manager, General Shale Brick, Inc., said there are a few extra steps involved when her company sends information to the NTCR, but it's nothing laborious: "A/R comes straight from our database. The information is pulled right from the system, even if it does take some time to generate. If you don't have the information going in, there is no report to be found. It comes down to: Do you want a strong credit report out there or not?"

The number of members sharing with the NTCR has increased by between 15% and 20% in the last year even though the big push for the report didn't happen until Credit Congress in June. It would be hard to argue against the theory that a big part of the surge comes from the increased level of flexibility in how NACM affiliates accept the data.

## Flexibility in Submitting Data

"Some find it easier to work with Excel. We, as an affiliate, have templates where they can FTP it through the web as well. We're pretty flexible with how we take the data," Walsh said. "I hear 'I can't fit another thing into month-end,' well, it doesn't have to be at month-end if that doesn't fit with their work flow." She added that some NACM affiliates will even take data manually in worst-case scenarios.

Shannon Abnal, CGA, group services manager at NACM Oregon, echoed the sentiment noting that credit professionals submitting the data don't even have to cram everything onto one file if that's problematic. Things like splitting aging and addresses aren't really a deal-breaker for the affiliates that feed information into the NTCR.

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This is another significant sea change from the old days when various sources generating credit reports were more rigid. In the past, sometimes not so distant past, credit bureaus and NACM might have been reluctant to take different formats, Abnal recalled. "Where we differ from the last decade is that many NACM affiliates are taking whatever they're giving us and then formatting it to match," she said. "People might have been told in the past 'this is the only format we'll take.' I would encourage people to look again. Here [NACM Oregon], if they can get it to me, we'll take it. We really try not to say 'no.' I believe the NACMs have woken up to this, and most often will accommodate."

Part of accommodating, in Abnal's mind, means allowing businesses to use the same extract for reports to multiple bureaus and the NTCR. Let's face it: many credit professionals report to several different sources. Some are even required by multi-year contracts to share data. Abnal's belief is that there are very few negatives to letting people use the same extract with different bureaus as well as the affiliates. In essence, why make more work for the people you want sharing their important trade data? "I would say [to those sharing] to push the other vendors to take the files given," Abnal said. "I don't see the reason to force them to have to generate and send another extract. Nobody should be against piggy-backing."

### So Much Easier

Bobbie Butler, credit and collection manager with Tindell's, Inc., remembers the old days of submitting data. In past decades, submitting the information for Tindell's meant literally printing reams of paper and driving it to an affiliate's office where the information would be keyed in manually. That was the most efficient and cost-effective thing to do at the time. It's hard to imagine this now in the digital era for some credit professionals who are very young or just new to the game. But even then, Butler and her colleagues thought it was worth sharing the data because it's good for their businesses, industries, the credit profession and was just the "fair" thing to do.

"Remember that green-bar computer paper? I'll bet it was five or six inches deep when I would take it to the affiliate; I don't know how they got through all of that. We have come from the Stone Age to a couple of clicks and we're done," Butler said.

"Now that it's electronic, it's so much easier. I just have to put a spreadsheet of my aging together and submit it to NACM-Tampa. That staff is on the ball. It's just a couple of clicks for me, and the information is in there. It doesn't take me more than two minutes to contribute my information unless I screw up a click. It has simplified my credit journey immensely."

As for the excuse that "I don't have time to share my data," Butler, as well as Mark Horn, CCE, corporate credit manager with Mayer Electric Supply Co., Inc., are outspoken in saying that this rationale doesn't wash anymore because of secure technological advances and newfound submission flexibility, at least within the NTCR. There's nothing wrong, per se, with not knowing the process if approaching sharing credit trade-line data for the first time—everyone starts somewhere. But, in their estimation, with all the advancements and huge support network offered by NACM and NACM affiliates throughout the nation, the time is here for everyone to learn.

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"I remember when sending all the trade tapes in whatever format they had to go to 10 different NACM locations in the past. It was difficult to do and time consuming," Horn said. "In this computer age, you can't tell me it is that difficult sharing your trade information or your A/R. Even a very small company we just acquired—a one-location operation—sends their data quickly anytime we ask for it...Even with their small operating system, they are able to generate the information quickly and send it to us."

"There are no excuses anymore, not that I'm aware of." ●

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*This is the third in the series of articles on the NTCR. The first, "A Good Place to Start: Digging into the Nuts and Bolts of the National Trade Credit Report" appeared in the June 2012 issue, and "A Credit Community: Why Your Company Should Be Sharing Its A/R Data" appeared in the September/October issue. More on the NTCR will appear in future issues.*