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ThomasNet: Age-Old Tool Gains New Life

The digital version of Thomas Register is a cutting-edge data delivery system for the design engineer.

By Cabe Atwell, Contributing Writer

The paper tome of the Thomas Register of American Manufacturers has long since been recycled. ThomasNet email barrages have long since been blocked, yet the importance of the resource may just be growing. While it's a relief to leave behind the paper versions of the Thomas reference books, they did serve as an efficient tool. The digital tool may become an even more important tool. With Thomas data now residing in the cloud, it's time to take a new look at Thomas Register, now ThomasNet, one of the oldest design/build resources in design engineering history.

Given that ThomasNet is a 115-year-old company, you might expect a rather stale and clunky website. Instead, you'll find an easy-to-use platform that is quickly accessible. Young design engineers have zero patience for clunky websites.
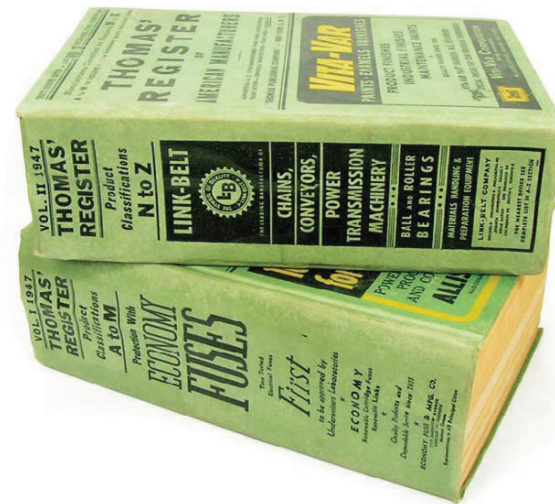
Deep Search Capabilities
In search for ultrasound gel for use in a LED light-scattering project you'll find more than 100 places to get the gel inside the US. And while it's hard to find an easy way to buy a gallon, at least you can see who manufactures it. A search by popularity would have been nice, as would individual ratings. Amazon tends to spoil our meticulous searching patience.

ThomasNet reps explained that they have an army of engineers on staff that work with the site's content, design, and functionality to keep it relevant and accessible. The wide range of search options makes it clear the company is trying to anticipate users' needs. Yet sometimes thorough is too thorough, as the selection can be cumbersome.

A Universe of Suppliers
The platform's mainstay Supplier Discovery application includes 700,000 North American companies. If you want to support manufacturers in North America, this database allows you to quickly compile a shortlist of viable sources. ThomasNet notes that recent improvements to the applica-

Source: draplin.com

For decades, these thick reference books were close at hand for the design engineer.

tion include the ability to select qualifiers such as product or service, location, quality certifications, and company type.

You can further refine your search to access individualized supplier profiles. These include product lines, equipment lists, the brand names carried, demographics, certifications, news, and videos.

To help support the engineer's bill-of-materials work, the platform offers a Product Sourcing application, which combines semantic search with product taxonomy, enabling the engineer to find line-item detail on more than 100 million parts. The site also offers a detailed look into raw materials, components, and finished products that can be sourced by attribute, specific keyword, or part number.

If you need confirmation that the component you're researching will fit into the product you're designing, ThomasNet.com allows many parts to be viewed as 2D or 3D CAD models so they can be downloaded and manipulated into an overall design. The technology is compatible with all the major CAD systems. Importing and manipulating these component CAD drawings is relatively easy.

Certification Assurance
Although certifications through testing can save lives, certifications are not always of critical concern — functionality trumps all. Even so, the ThomasNet.com Certification application helps to identify suppliers that hold quality and other certifications and registrations, including ISO, ANSI, Nadcap, ITAR, FDA, and C-TPAT, among 80 certification types. Engineers can also identify and access current and historical certificates that are available for download. This can be a big help when it's necessary to support your product with REACH or other certification data.
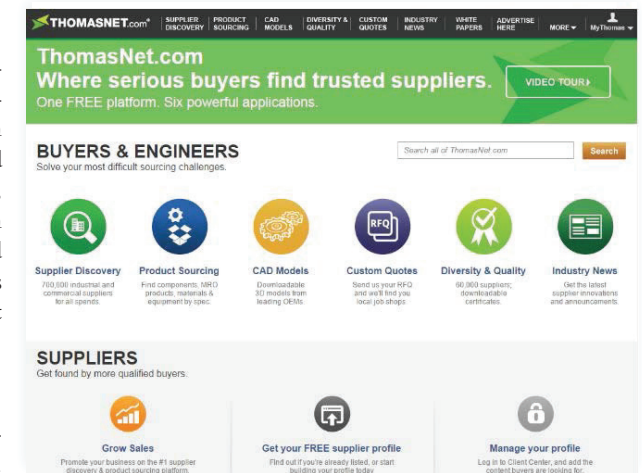
Diversity Support
One somewhat controversial search parameter in ThomasNet, is the Diversity Application, a new feature of the site. It reduces the buyer's needs to consult several resources in order to locate suppliers to meet diverse spend goals. ThomasNet notes that its provides "one of the largest databases of minority, woman-owned, veteran-owned, and other disadvantaged businesses." Many have downloadable certificates available. For those involved in government projects, this selection can be handy.

Ancillary Data
News, press releases, and blogs pepper the site, adding depth on the individual suppliers. While the parts go-to search box is the critical function of the site, supporting info can help when choosing a major supplier and the company breadth of products and frequency of new product introductions matters.

To help support the use of this tool, ThomasNet has introduced ThomasNet Onsite, which includes free, customized training sessions, available on-premises or via webinar, to educate design engineers and sourcing professionals on the full range of the site's capabilities. Subjects covered by the classes and webinars include strategies for finding quality-certified suppliers, identifying capable local job shops, getting competitive pricing on off-the-shelf products, and locating hard-to-find parts.

Given its wide range of functionality, ThomasNet.com can be a critical resource for the design engineer. The old difficult-to-use paper register on a bookshelf is gone; in its place is a vast collection of relevant and current data in the cloud. **DN**

Source: thomasnet.com

The homepage for ThomasNet is quickly accessible, clear, and easy to use.

For More Information:
ThomasNet: **www.thomasnet.com/**