



Dear EBMDA Dealer:

The past couple of years have been tough, to say the least. 2010 doesn't look much better. As sales have fallen, you've probably cut your expenses and feel like you've cut about as much as you can cut. But have you? Even if you are profitable, are there other places you can trim, at least until sales start picking up? Are you spending too much on vehicle maintenance? Are you reaping as much revenue from rebates and delivery fees as your competitors? Do you know how your salaries compare to others in your area? Are you the high man on the block, or are you so low that other dealers can pick off your best people?

**It's hard to know the answers to those questions. In this market, "gut feeling" just isn't enough. You need to know for sure. But how?**

The regional LBM associations are coming together to launch a new Building Material Operations Comparison program to let you see how you compare to the region and the nation. The Construction Suppliers Association, based in the Atlanta area and serving Georgia and Alabama, created this program two years ago and has used it for dealer roundtables. We're now making it available nationwide.

The program lets you put your financial information into a secure, web-based system. No other dealers see your data or even know you have participated. Once the survey period is over, you log back into the system to see about 90 charts and graphs comparing your operational costs and salaries to a regional and a national average. Cost to participate is only \$200. The information you gain from the survey will almost certainly help you make changes in your business worth far more than that.

A flyer with more detailed information and a registration form is enclosed. For a brief video overview of the system, go to <http://financials.gocsa.com/Tutorials/Overview/>

Participating in this program is one of the easiest and cheapest ways you can help your business survive in this economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David L. Garrett".

David L. Garrett  
Executive Director, EBMDA

## Using the Building Material Operational Comparison Program

### Logging On/Administration

You will receive a username and password from the association. Your username will remain the same, but the system will force you to change your password the first time you log on. This is for security purposes. Only you will know the password (it can be changed by the association, but it can't be seen by anyone but you), so keep it handy.

Once you log on, you'll want to complete your profile by clicking [View a List of Current Users](#), then [Edit](#). Also, you can add other people from your company by clicking [Add User](#) at the top of the screen. You can give them any level of access you wish – from simply entering data all the way to reviewing data and printing charts. It is up to you to determine who, if anyone, from your company you want to have this access. For instance, if you don't want to enter the data yourself, you'll need to create a username and login for someone in your accounting department.

### Completing the Data Forms

Click [Financial Data](#), then [Start a New Financial Dataset](#) to open the pages for data entry. There are definitions for the categories. It's important that you read these definitions and make sure your numbers conform to the definitions. Otherwise, your charts are not going to be accurate and your data will corrupt the national and regional numbers. We know that even when following GAAP accounting principles, everyone's financials are going to be reported slightly differently (for instance, do you include forklifts in your vehicle maintenance?). You almost certainly will not be able to plug your financials into the system without further calculations. The system is designed to get as close as possible to an apples-to-apples comparison of companies.

As you enter data, the system will make some automatic calculations. For instance, when you enter cash sales and charge sales, the system will automatically calculate total sales. Not only does this speed data entry, it also serves as a check for you to make sure you've entered numbers accurately.

If you have no data to enter in a particular category, you still need to enter a zero. The system requires a numeral in every category.

You do not have to enter all of your data at once. But, if you are leaving the system, be sure to save by clicking the Save button at the bottom of each data entry page. There is no automatic save function with this system. If you close out the program without saving, data you've input since your last save will be lost. Also note that the system has a one-hour timeout. If you leave your computer, the screen will stay active for up to an hour. At one hour, the system will timeout and close itself for security purposes. You can, of course, log back in, but data not saved will be lost.

Once you've completed data entry, the next step is validation. Click the [Data Validation](#) tab at the top of the page, then [Run Validation](#). Validation is simply asking the system to check your numbers. The system has some built-in safeguards to help prevent data-entry mistakes. Once the system has checked your numbers, any categories with problems will be flagged for you to review. Once all the problems have been resolved, you can resubmit for validation. When all of your data is validated, it is automatically

submitted to the system. Once that happens, your data is final – you can't make further changes. Therefore, do not attempt to validate the data until you are sure you've made all the changes you want.

After validation, your numbers now figure into the regional and national (or "system") totals. Note that no one except you (and your roundtable colleagues, if you are in a roundtable) can see your individual numbers.

Once your data is submitted to the system, you also have access to the aggregate regional and national numbers. Roundtable members also have access to their roundtable average and to the numbers from their colleagues in their roundtable.

### **Charts and Reports**

Though you have access to the aggregate regional and national numbers the instant your own data is submitted, keep in mind that those numbers are going to change until April 1. This is a real-time system that re-calculates regional and national averages with every new set of data submitted. There is an April 1 deadline for all companies participating in the process. It's a good bet that many (maybe even most) of the participating companies are going to finalize their numbers in the last couple of working days prior to April 1. However, there is no limit to the times you can access the system for reports, so there is no harm in viewing or printing reports when you finish your data AND coming back to review or print the reports after April 1.

To access reports, click the [Charts and Sheets](#) button on the home screen. There are two ways to access reports. Once you select your dataset (the year for which you want to run a report), you can [View Charts](#) on your screen or you can [Create a Book](#) which generates a PDF file for printing. You have a variety of options for your charts, available by clicking [My Preferences](#) on the left side of the screen. For instance you can select line charts or bar charts. Once you have several years of history in the system, you can select the number of years you want to see in your charts. You can also choose all the charts or certain ones that are more meaningful to you.

Note that the salary data is only available from the [Create a Book](#) function.

Also, note that in the first year of your participation in this program, you will only have one year of data, which may look sparse on the page. The real value is in participating over time. The system retains your data, and you can view or print charts with as much history as you have in the system. This allows you to compare your business with others in the most current year AND see trends within your business over time. (If you are wondering why the system only puts one chart on each page, this is the reason. The system was designed to allow for multiple years on each page.)

All data you enter into the system is exportable to Microsoft Excel by clicking [Export Data](#) at the top of the Financial Data screen.

For assistance, contact the office of your regional LBM association.