Akeneo Special Edition

Product Experience Management

For dummies®

A Wiley Brand

Understand PXM basics

Get ten tips to a successful PXM practice

Navigate the experience economy

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John Evans

About Akeneo

Akeneo is a global leader in Product Experience Management (PXM) helping businesses unlock growth opportunities by delivering a consistent and compelling product experience across all channels, including e-commerce, mobile, print, points of sale, and beyond. With its open platform, leading PIM, add-ons, connectors, and marketplace, Akeneo PXM Studio dramatically improves product data quality and accuracy, simplifies catalog management, and accelerates the sharing of product information across channels and locales. Leading global brands, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers, including Staples Canada, Fossil, Air Liquide, and Myer, trust Akeneo to scale and customize their omnichannel commerce initiatives. By using Akeneo, brands and retailers can improve customer experience, increase sales, reduce time to market, go global, and boost team productivity. Visit **www.akeneo.com** or contact **hello@akeneo.com** to learn more.

Product Experience Management

Akeneo Special Edition

By John Evans

dummies
A Wiley Brand

Product Experience Management For Dummies®,
Akeneo Special Edition

Publisher's Acknowledgments

Author's Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Customer experience has become the centerpiece of most marketing strategies today. Marketers have begun to realize that it's the biggest differentiator a brand or a retailer has in today's overcrowded market. And great customer experience starts with a compelling product experience. Customers have their pick of products and shopping channels, so standing out in the crowd with relevant product information is imperative.

For this reason, Product Experience Management (PXM) is a necessity. The ability to prepare your product catalog to flow into every channel in the required format is no easy feat. This book was created to explain PXM and to describe the practices and tools business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) marketers need to address this problem.

About This Book

Welcome to *Product Experience Management For Dummies,* Akeneo Special Edition. This book covers several topics you may not easily find elsewhere. It presents PXM as a connection among three types of capabilities — Product Information Management (PIM), Digital Asset Management (DAM), and Product Content Syndication (PCS) — that each excel in its respective area to produce the best possible PXM solution.

You look at

>> **Navigating the experience economy:** In the 21st century, most goods online have become commoditized. You look at how this situation has evolved. Control has shifted to buyers — they can explore many options and find the lowest price. Technology has enabled a variety of new ways to shop, and you need to be ready to accommodate all of them.

>> **An in-depth definition of PXM:** PXM involves more than technical data. It also means you need to create content that delivers an emotional connection. You discover how to move from managing data to crafting and delivering experiences.

- **»** **Understanding a PIM solution:** At the heart of the ability to manage product information is PIM. PIM solutions are increasingly more sophisticated, and choosing the right one is key to developing product experiences that win customers.

- **»** **Understanding a DAM solution:** DAM solutions help you organize your digital assets in one central location and find any kind of digital asset (for example, image, document, video) you need. It also protects your assets with version control and allows you to manage roles and permissions.

- **»** **Understanding a PCS solution:** A PCS solution is key to preparing your data to distribute to all your unowned shopping channels. It helps you manage and structure data feeds so you can efficiently syndicate product data to major online channels, such as Google Shopping, Facebook Marketplace, and Amazon.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, you see different icons. Here's what they mean.

This icon provides you with ways to do things faster or more easily. Because PXM is a relatively new concept, Tip icons point out new ideas and how they fit together. I also include things I think may help provide a solution to something you're looking for.

This icon points out foundational PXM points that are useful.

I use this icon when I want to include some information for those readers who want to go a bit deeper into the technical details of PXM.

The Warning icon alerts you to things that can be harmful to you, your company, or your success with PXM.

Beyond the Book

This book is aimed at helping you learn more about PXM and the components that help you create great product experiences. Some resources that you'll find helpful that go beyond this book include

» `www.akeneo.com/white-paper/product-information-management-101:` Are you new to the concept of PIM? If so, check out this PIM 101 e-book and learn how Akeneo radically simplifies the process of creating, maintaining, and using product descriptions and specifications for online and offline product catalogs.

» `www.akeneo.com/white-paper/product-information-management-implementation-best-practices:` PIM is a powerful technology with the potential to improve not only internal operations but also boost sales and reduce product returns, so it's important to get it right from the start. To do so, focus on choosing the right solution to meet your business needs and ensuring a good implementation across your organization to truly realize the PIM benefits. If your company is ready to get its PIM project off on the right foot, read these top ten tips and tricks to get the most out of a PIM.

» `www.akeneo.com/pxm-maturity-assessment:` Where are you on the path to unlocking your business's growth through great product experiences? This self-assessment helps you understand your product information management strengths and capability gaps, asking questions about the people, the processes, and the tools you use to manage your product data. Take this assessment and receive a personalized report with tailored insights, resources, and recommendations on how to improve.

Chapter **1**

Navigating the Experience Economy

The internet creates a vast commoditization of goods. With relative ease, you can find the product you want at the low-est price and have it delivered quickly. To get a customer to pay attention, you need to create a memorable experience. There must be a reason why customers buy your product over another.

In this chapter, you look at what Product Experience Manage-ment (PXM) is and why you need to have the right system in place to provide a satisfying and emotionally charged experience that makes your product compelling to buy.

Understanding the Experience Economy

In 1999, Joseph Pine and James Gilmore wrote a book entitled *The Experience Economy.* The context is about how people trade money for time. This concept and the progression of economic value help us understand how we arrived at the place where customer expe-riences are the centerpiece of business models.

Pine and Gilmore say that in today's economy companies differ-entiate themselves from their competitors by moving up the economic value chain to provide excellent customer experiences. This value chain concept is shown in Figure 1-1.
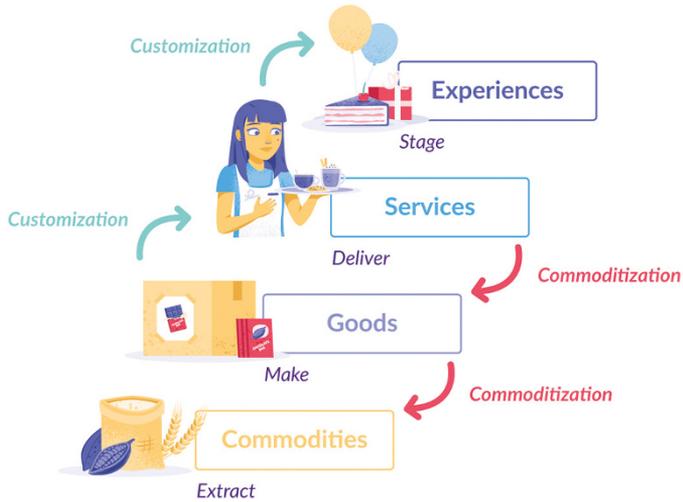
FIGURE 1-1: The progression of economic value.

To help explain this concept a bit more, here is how this value chain evolved:

1. **The value chain started with *commodities.***

   The agrarian economy was based on commodities. In a commodities-based economy, people didn't care about the brand or the features; they only cared about the price.

2. **Next came *goods.***

   An industrial economy, which was based on manufactured goods, came next. People paid more for a product that enhanced a commodity by adding some perceived value and adding their brand name to it.

3. **The next economy was *services.***

   Value was added by packaging goods with services. In the current services economy, goods have become commod-itized so that price is now the main difference — think about how long-distance telephone service or cable television is sold on price.

4. **Finally, the experience economy arrived.**

Goods and services are no longer enough. With everything becoming commoditized, it's time to move to a new level of economic value that's focused on staging experiences for your customers. Experiences become a distinct economic offering. This is where growth comes from and where you need to innovate.

One of the key distinctions in economic value between a service and an experience is how time is used. What does this mean to your company? To truly differentiate, you need to move beyond offering "time well saved" as a value proposition. You have to create a "time well spent" experience, so customers want to spend time on your websites or in your stores. The more time they spend with you, the more money they may spend.

REMEMBER

Give careful attention to the idea of time well spent. If you're a brand or a retailer who has a fascinating in-store experience, you may be able to charge admission to enter the store or participate in a special event. If you're an online retailer, look at your customer journey and think about how you can create an emotional connection for visitors to your e-commerce site.

Recognizing the Need for Innovation

If you read the preceding section, you now know why experience has become the currency of the realm for brands and retailers. If you didn't read that section, take a look when you get a chance. But in this section, I give you the key areas that drive innovation in commerce.

Increasing retail disruption

The status quo in retail has been disrupted. The increasingly dynamic efforts in retail mean that merchants need to continually innovate to remain ahead of and differentiated from their online and offline competitors. Similarly, brands need to ensure that their products are represented correctly in new channels, which brings new buyer interaction paradigms, such as voice search.

A great example of increasing retail disruption is Amazon's dominance in online sales and its initiatives to move into a variety of channel models, such as Whole Foods brick-and-mortar grocery stores and the increasingly popular Echo device and Alexa virtual assistant.

Changing behaviors and characteristics of buyers

Now that e-commerce has been in place for well over 20 years, a new wave of millennial buyers is coming of age in an era where it has always been possible to shop and buy online. In the business-to-business (B2B) sector, the phenomenon is particularly acute — B2B is generally later to market in offering e-commerce sites compared to the business-to-consumer (B2C) sector.

TIP

Millennials look for Amazon–like customer experiences everywhere and are accustomed to doing significant product research before entering a store or purchasing online. B2B and B2C merchants need to innovate to keep pace with the way buyers want to interact with and be informed by each channel.

Proliferating e-commerce channels

New channels and formats appear quickly. Buyers rapidly adapt to new technologies and change the way they shop. For example, they use voice assistants, buy from mobile applications, and use multiple social media sites.

Some online retailers are using in-store techniques such as pop-up shops, concept stores, and showrooms. Each of these channels offers a different way for customers to interact with your products — and as a result, you'll need to manage different product experiences for each channel.

REMEMBER

Each of the trends in this section has significant implications for how product information is prepared and delivered. The ultimate objective of PXM is to enable marketers and commerce teams to easily and efficiently manage product information and deliver it in context using adaptable, flexible, robust, and built-for-purpose tools.

Diversifying channel-specific needs

Technology innovations are developing at a fast pace. The adoption of voice assistant technology is growing and one study reported that 26 percent of smart speaker users have ordered something via voice.

These new channels require product information to be made available in different contexts. Even the way people search via voice versus typing is different. A paragraph-long product description and rich images will work for print and e-commerce sites, but a product description for a voice assistant needs to be much shorter. Merchants must, therefore, prepare their product data in different contexts for such things as voice-activated shopping assistants that are becoming increasingly popular.

Globalized and cross-border commerce

Online shopping makes it easy for consumers to access global markets. According to Forrester Research, cross-border e-commerce is set to reach $736 billion in sales by 2023, making up a grand total of 17 percent of e-commerce as a whole. That's a substantial audience.

This development requires that brands and online retailers create and execute a seamless international e-commerce strategy. From a product information standpoint, this means your product catalog needs to

» Be available in the local language.

» Use the appropriate technical information to accommodate different sizes (for example, shoe and apparel sizing in the United States, United Kingdom, European, and Asian markets).

» Consider local norms, including culturally appropriate imagery and regulatory requirements for things like ingredients.

REMEMBER

Handling cross-border and global commerce not only increases the size and complexity of your product catalog but also creates the need to consider what the best product experience means for each channel used in each locale (the combination of a language and a country).

Growing expectations and need for omnichannel experiences

Consumers don't care what device or channel they buy from. They want to experience a consistent and contextual product experience across all channels. Imagine the confusion that results when customers find differing product descriptions and information depending on which channel (print, store, or online) they're on. While product information must be consistent and accurate across multiple channels, it does *not* mean that it needs to be uniform — you need to put product information in context.

Complex and fast-growing technology ecosystems

New technologies are constantly popping up. One of those that has great potential is artificial intelligence (AI). You may already see AI becoming part of your online experience in the form of recommendation engines and improved search capabilities. As AI becomes even more prevalent, people expect brands and retailers to anticipate their needs and give them exactly what they want with less time and effort. AI is increasingly used to provide merchants and brands with product intelligence they can use to help craft more compelling product experiences.

Other technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are already starting to appear in numerous markets. It's not hard to imagine that customers will begin to expect such technologies to create even more spectacular immersive customer and brand experiences, which will have implications for how product information is delivered. Build a foundation so you'll be prepared for the next big thing whatever that may be.

Fulfilling the Need for Agile Product Data

To supply great product experiences, you need agile product data. Agile product data has these key characteristics:

» **Always available:** Instead of being locked in proprietary operational systems, product data needs to be collected, standardized, enriched, and readily available to your commerce platforms.

>> **Easily transformable:** Product information you've collected and standardized should be able to be easily transformed for the consuming commerce platform — for example, your e-commerce platform, print system, point-of-sale (POS) system — as well as marketplaces that typically dictate product information listing requirements.

>> **Consistent and high quality:** All technical and qualitative information as well as imagery and usability details used to describe your products should be accurate, comprehensive, and consistent wherever they appear. With poor quality product data, buyers will quickly move on to a competing product or to a merchant who's able to provide more actionable information.

>> **Highly connected to a large ecosystem:** Different technologies are used to run different types of commerce platforms. Your product information hub needs to be able to seamlessly connect with relevant platforms as well as related technologies in use that drive the product experience.

>> **Always in the right context:** Differing channels, locales, standards, and cultural norms all play a factor in making sure product data is delivered in context, so the product experience is relevant and compelling to encourage conversions.

Defining PXM

Every day, there are thousands of platforms and channels on which products are listed, advertised, presented, and sold. For this reason, brands and retailers need to populate all shopper and buyer touchpoints with

>> Strong, compelling brands and product experiences

>> Consistent stories told in a unified way

>> Product messages, formats, and presentation styles that match the unique channel they are on

This means that the right product needs to be displayed in the right format, structure, and style of the respective channel. Context is king!

This sounds great, right? So how can merchants and brands create and master this kind of messaging? Use a PXM solution to overcome the limitations of using spreadsheets and other ill-suited tools.

WARNING

Unfortunately, many organizations use spreadsheets and other manual methods to manage product data, which they've found to be inefficient, time-consuming, and error-prone. With the need to focus on crafting an experience, using tools that weren't designed to support delivering product data in context makes this task difficult and costly to achieve.

Product information consists of more than technical data. It's also about usage and emotional data. By understanding this, you can move from managing data to crafting and delivering experiences.

REMEMBER

PXM is an emerging practice and category of business application, and I like to use the following points for a comprehensive definition:

» PXM is the subtle science of delivering product information in context, adapted and tailored by channel and locale to match the buying experience at every touchpoint.

» Having the right data and insight into the type of product experience buyers expect is the foundation for any great customer experience.

PXM requires different tools and practices to enable B2C retailers and brands and B2B distributors and manufacturers to deliver exciting product experiences. Chapter 2 covers the software you need to create a complete PXM solution.

Chapter **2**
Crafting Compelling Product Experiences

D id you ever expect that product experience would become your greatest competitive advantage? Today, customers expect an emotionally satisfying product experience when they look at your product information. It's not optional. Their expectations are high, and you have to meet them. Your custom-ers expect a great experience at every touchpoint so your brand message must be consistent yet differentiated across channels.

In this chapter, you look at how your company can benefit from implementing a well-thought-out Product Experience Manage-ment (PXM) solution and how to get buy-in from your managers.

Creating Value with PXM

In Chapter 1, you see a comprehensive definition of PXM. In this section, you look at the value PXM brings to you and your customers.

Increasing conversions

One of the major benefits of providing a great product experience is that your customers reward you with more purchases. Companies using PXM solutions have reported up to a 400 percent increase in conversion rates.

Reducing returns

Better product information also results in fewer returns. When customers are shown high-quality product information and images that accurately depict the product, they're more likely to buy and less likely to return the product. Companies using PXM solutions have reported up to a 40 percent decrease in return rates.

Enhancing brand loyalty

PXM tools allow you to communicate your brand values and to create an emotional connection with your buyers, which makes them more likely to stay loyal to your brand. When customers enjoy the experience, they're more likely to turn into repeat customers, write positive reviews, and refer their friends.

Accelerating speed to market

With tools designed to manage product information, you can get products to market faster across all your channels and regions because PXM solutions are purpose-fit to manage and feed all product information across all sales channels.

A quick time to market is particularly important for brands and merchants offering seasonal products and sales activities. Moreover, it's also critical for those who regularly update their product catalogs in response to new product releases or changing consumer trends.

Increasing efficiency and effectiveness

A PXM solution provides productivity tools that automate many catalog-management and product-feed-management tasks. With manual tasks out of the way and automated business rules and workflows in place, your team can be free to focus on performance and delivering a great product experience.

Developing Buy-In

Buy-in from company executives is key to making your PXM strategy a success. If you're wondering how to approach each position, take a look in this section for a few ideas.

CMOs and directors of e-commerce

CMOs and directors of e-commerce are interested in enhanced brand identity and business growth. They want to know how a PXM solution will impact the bottom line.

What to tell them: A standout product experience will result in higher conversion rates, reduced return rates, and the ability to scale product offerings more quickly while fueling a superior brand experience.

C-level decision makers/general management

C-level decision makers and general management care about the ability to expand the business and save costs. They want to deliver more products to more markets across more channels. They want to know how a PXM solution gives them a 21st-century sales experience that creates a substantial competitive advantage.

What to tell them: They'll be able to calculate an increased return on investment (ROI) from more sales and fewer returns and be able to expand market share by taking advantage of new sales channels and expanding into new markets.

Product marketing and catalog managers

Product marketing and catalog managers are interested in productivity gains and reducing errors. They want to make every process faster, more efficient, and more accurate.

What to tell them: A PXM solution will simplify their lives by automating and accelerating their current processes. Eliminating manual tasks helps reduce typos and other common errors that occur when cutting and pasting product data. With manual work out of the way, they'll be able to focus on more

creative, value-added tasks, such as writing compelling product descriptions.

IT decision makers

IT decision makers are interested in getting the right tools to help marketers do their jobs and then ensuring those tools work in their technology infrastructure. They want to empower these data experts, facilitate data governance, and eliminate gaps from legacy systems.

What to tell them: A PXM solution will provide purpose-built tools to control who does what with the product data and sync with other enterprise applications. Selecting a cloud-native technology allows IT to manage scale and reduce infrastructure costs. It also offers an ecosystem of partners that can help implement, support, and extend the solution.

Putting Together a PXM Solution

To craft compelling product experiences, the most robust and complete PXM solution combines three categories of capabilities:

» **Managing product information:** Product Information Management (PIM) capabilities are the cornerstone of PXM. A PIM tool contains the golden record (one source of truth) of your product data (descriptions, technical attributes, categorizations, and so on). It's your complete, correct, clean, and enriched product content. Discover more about PIM tools in Chapter 4.

The focus of PIM is to collect all kinds of data (often in different formats and from different locations), standardize that data, enrich it so it's complete, and put it into context for each channel and locale (the combination of a country and language). After that, it distributes the catalog to your channels and locales.

» **Managing digital assets:** Managing your digital assets is another essential component in PXM. Digital assets are the key supporting images, videos, and documents used in your e-commerce, marketplace, print, and other online catalogs. Images and videos can be manipulated as required for each

sales channel. A Digital Asset Management (DAM) system brings the emotional touch that's essential to the product experience. I discuss DAM systems more in Chapter 5.

» **Managing catalog feeds and syndication:** Your final goal is to have your buyers interact with your completed product information on all your channels. You can create optimized feeds to help syndicate enriched and contextualized product information to a wider variety of unowned channels such as marketplaces. The type of software that helps accomplish this is called Product Content Syndication (PCS) tools.

A PCS tool keeps track of what product information marketplaces require so your products will be accurately represented. It can also be used to help collect data from different external sources to help ensure your product information is as complete and robust as possible. Chapter 6 covers PCS tools further.

These capabilities together enable your marketing and commerce teams to create and deliver a contextualized, consistent, compelling product experience by engaging in the subtle science of PXM. In Figure 2-1, you see what a complete PXM solution looks like.
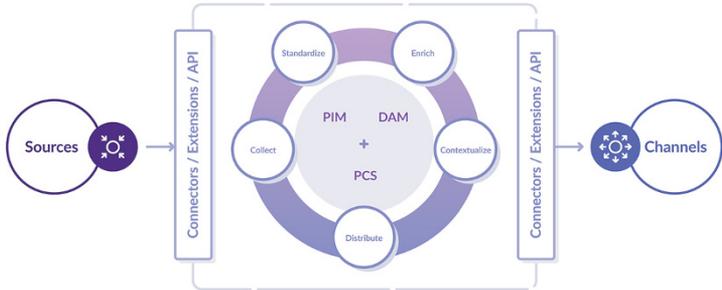
FIGURE 2-1: A complete PXM solution.

Your raw product data typically resides in a variety of sources. The following list includes the types of data sources where product data currently lies. Data from these sources is imported via the connectors, extensions, and Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) from the left side of Figure 2-1. Some data comes from internal systems such as your Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and marketing systems. Other data is in the hands of suppliers. Still, other data could be in external data pools or on other websites.

Common sources of product data can include

>> Marketing databases

>> ERP systems

>> Excel files

>> Media servers

>> Suppliers

>> Analytics systems

>> Price comparison databases

>> Product rating databases

>> Content providers

As shown on the right side of Figure 2-1, the following list includes the potential channels to which your product catalog is published. These channels can include

>> Print catalogs

>> Point-of-sale (POS) systems

>> e-commerce/webshops

>> Mobile applications

>> Search channels

>> Social media

>> Marketplaces

>> Comparison shopping

>> Retargeting and affiliates

>> Marketing automation

>> Retailers and wholesalers

>> Data pools

>> Voice assistants

The middle section of Figure 2-1 is where the PXM magic happens. Each of the core PIM, DAM, and PCS capabilities helps enable marketers and commerce teams to fully craft compelling product experiences. The PXM solution will enable marketers to

go through the PXM journey to manage the product experience. That journey includes

» **Collecting** and **accessing** data from various sources using pre-built connectors, extensions, or APIs

» **Standardizing** data from different formats to create common product categories and product attribute names in a single, common catalog format

» **Enriching** product data with additional attributes, images, and compelling descriptions to help create the emotional connection and story you want to tell your customers

» **Contextualizing** the product information so it fits the channel, language, and country

» **Distributing** the enriched, contextualized product data to all your channels — those you manage as well as external channels like marketplaces

Check out Chapter 3 for more about the product journey.

TECHNICAL STUFF

How much do your customers care about quality product information? Forrester reports that 85 percent of customers rate product information as the top feature they want from an e-commerce website. Make sure you have high-quality data that's ready to use across channels.

Chapter **3**
Starting the PXM Journey

D
ocumenting and understanding the Product Experience Management (PXM) journey is key to creating successful product experiences. In this chapter, you look at the journey that product data takes as it's transformed from raw data to product experiences to your sales channels. This process is called the PXM journey.

To fully understand the PXM journey, you need to know about the flow of product information. This flow is illustrated in Figure 3-1. Each section in this chapter explains this figure in more depth.
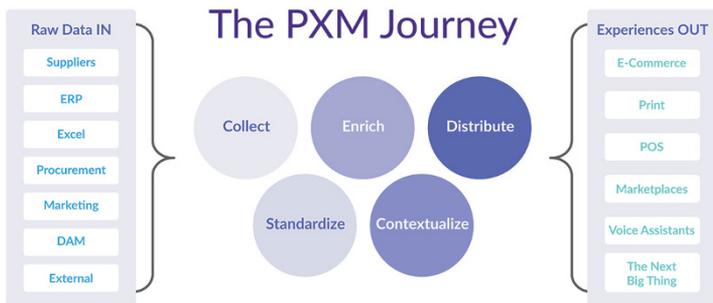
FIGURE 3-1: The PXM journey.

Collect

Your raw product data exists in a wide variety of systems. Some of these are internal to your organization such as your Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, marketing database, procurement system, certain spreadsheet files, and more. Other sources are external, such as supplier systems. The first step in your PXM journey is to collect raw product data from these disparate systems. This step can be difficult because, more often than not, the file formats will differ across each source.

Standardize

The formatting of the files isn't the only challenge you have when collecting data. The format of the data itself is going to be different as well. Each source will have its own attribute naming scheme (for example, the column with the product names in them could be labeled Product_Name, prod-nm, name_prod, and so on). These column names will need to be standardized in order to accurately map and consolidate your raw data from these different sources. Additionally, you need to standardize the attribute values, such as brand name and color, within each column.

REMEMBER

The objective of this step is to make sure the product data can be consolidated so it makes sense to the marketer and can be easily configured for use in your catalog.

Enrich

After you collect and standardize the raw data, the next step is to enrich and control the quality of your product information. In order to complete this task, you need to

» Bring together all relevant attributes.

» Ensure all mandatory attribute fields are populated.

>> Classify your products into categories.

>> Add digital assets, such as images, videos, and documents.

To ensure high-quality data, control the process by using workflow-driven validation steps with your product data experts. This process ensures nothing is published without prior approval.

Contextualize

After your product data is complete and accurate, you need to put it into context for the different markets where your products will be seen. Contextualization is about localizing data for specific markets, translating it for different locales, and assigning images that are relevant and appropriate for the combination of destinations. Context is also about ensuring that the appropriate product data is used for each channel — for example, handling different product listing requirements for each marketplace, and customizing product descriptions for e-commerce, print, mobile, social, and so on. You may even create different product assortments for cross-border commerce as well.

Distribute

After you have a complete catalog that's tailored for different markets and channels, it's time to distribute your product information. Your enriched, contextualized product catalog will be spread across your e-commerce sites, printed material, mobile app, online sales channels, and more.

To accomplish this final step, you need pre-built or Application Programming Interface (API)-driven connectors to your various channels and a knowledge of their unique product information requirements.

SUPPORTING THE CUSTOMER'S BUYING JOURNEY

The key to creating a great customer experience is creating a buyer's journey that supports and enhances interactions in each channel. For example, your webshop allows you to organize products by category, the mobile experience will focus more on visual assets, while the in-store experience will have advisors who will be able to answer specific questions to address the smallest details sought by the customer.

In each step along the journey, your product information needs to be available to match the context that each platform (e-commerce, print, mobile, voice assistant, and so on) provides.

The best practice for PXM is to ensure that it includes product information delivered to support the following:

1. **Research:** Customers find products easily, mainly online where most buyers start their searches. High-quality descriptions are well-referenced and include marketplaces where over half of online sales take place today. Managing terms for search engine optimization (SEO) should be considered as part of managing product information to ensure your products are found in online searches.

2. **Consideration:** As they narrow their decisions, customers should find clear branding and good storytelling. They need to see complete and compelling technical, usage, and emotional information in context. At this step, they experience the power of peer-to-peer recommendations and rising social selling influence.

   Don't forget to put information on social networks. The correct context and meaning with emotional information need to be placed everywhere your customers search.

3. **Decision/purchase:** When customers are ready to make the final purchase decision, they need to see a description that's appropriate for each channel, images that render appropriately for each channel, and translations for each locale.

Chapter **4**

Understanding a PIM Solution

P roduct Information Management (PIM) solutions were born from a need to efficiently create and distribute product cata-logs to many different sales channels. Marketers didn't want to separately create a catalog for print, another for an e-commerce platform, and yet another for each individual mar-ketplace. A PIM solution allows commerce teams to manage prod-uct information in one place and distribute it in the right context to each channel. By doing so, they eliminate redundant work, reduce errors across channels, and streamline their catalog man-agement processes. This results in a more productive team and a faster time to market. In this chapter, you look at the PIM critical capabilities that support the Product Experience Management (PXM) journey (check out Chapter 3) and see how the workflow is managed.

Why You Need PIM Now

If you wonder why retailers and brands need PIM now more than ever, the answer is straightforward. The variety of different channels, platforms, and locales (the combination of a country and a language) make it necessary to have a scalable way to pro-vide customers with complete, accurate, and compelling product

information without having to do everything manually. A PIM solution efficiently supports all omnichannel and cross-border commerce initiatives.

Many organizations have tried to tackle managing product information with a spreadsheet. Why shouldn't you take this approach? We have all used spreadsheets for a wide variety of tasks in our personal and professional lives. It's the go-to tool when you want to manipulate data, and it's used for almost everything. But technology has evolved and given us a multitude of new tools to accomplish complex tasks. You need specialized tools to create high-quality data solutions.

Consider customer relationship management (CRM). Customer data isn't managed in spreadsheets anymore, so why use them to manage increasingly complex and diverse product data? When you had a small number of products, you could probably get away with using a spreadsheet. But that won't work for long considering that you need to export different versions of your product information to accommodate different formats, descriptions, measurements, languages, and much more for every new channel that comes along.

PXM is a new discipline that requires purpose-built tools. The leaders in today's market have moved away from spreadsheets and adopted PIM to collect, standardize, enrich, contextualize, and distribute all product data to sales channels. For example, a PIM tool offers you the ability to use business rules to automatically populate your product fields in bulk. This saves manual effort and reduces the chance of introducing typos and errors. PIM tools also offer workflows, so product catalogs are reviewed and approved before they're published. PIM tools also track completeness of your catalog to ensure that

- » Required fields are filled in.
- » Locales are fully translated.
- » Attributes and images are ready for the right channels.

Spreadsheets can't offer capabilities such as automation, tracked workflow, data governance, and data validation. Spreadsheets don't seamlessly connect to e-commerce platforms, marketplaces, mobile apps, voice assistants, and print catalogs. Automation helps your team focus on its real job — not on cutting and pasting or figuring out which version of a product is current.

Seeing How PIM Works

In the PIM workflow, shown in Figure 4-1, your product data source information comes from an array of systems and is imported into the PIM tool for enrichment and translation (if necessary). A good PIM solution provides a level of governance and control over your product information by using automation, user rights management, and permissions. After your catalogs are fully prepared and complete, you can distribute them to your various sales channels — your e-commerce site, print catalog, mobile app, marketplace, and others.
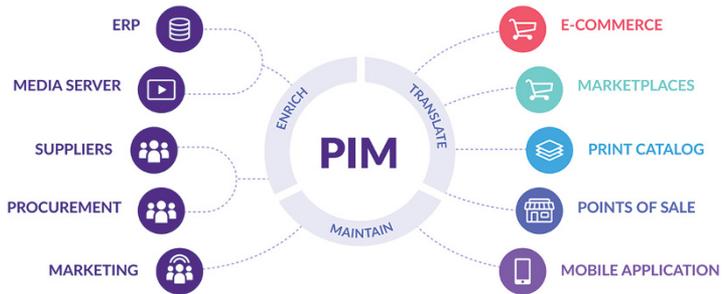
FIGURE 4-1: The PIM workflow.

On the left side of Figure 4-1, you see that product information flows from a variety of internal and external sources into the PIM tool. Included in the list of sources is digital assets — photos, videos, documents — that complement the text-based attributes managed in the PIM tool. Next, that data is enriched and controlled by your marketing team inside the PIM tool. Enrichment and control include standardization of the data from your many sources, classification into families and categories, as well as localization and translation if you're selling to buyers in other languages. PIM also offers capabilities to control the data, manage users, and govern the process. Putting the product data in context for different locales and channels also happens here. After that, the enriched data can be exported in the appropriate format to e-commerce platforms, marketplaces, print catalogs, point-of-sale (POS) systems, mobile applications, and more.

Looking at Must-Have PIM Features

PIM should enable your marketing teams to easily move through the PXM journey from disparate product data to compelling product experiences in all your sales channels. In this section, you discover the key PIM features.

Ease of use

To ensure adoption by the teams involved in creating product catalogs, your PIM tool needs to be easy to use. Look for a PIM tool that's easy to understand and learn and offers an intuitive user interface for everyone who interacts with the tool.

Data collection

With PIM, you should be able to import raw product content (data collection) in common file formats and/or connect directly to the source where this content resides. The sources can be both internal and external to your organization.

TECHNICAL STUFF

Connectors to source systems should be available as packaged connectors and Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to give you maximum flexibility and support for all possible sources.

Product standardization, organization, and categorization

Your raw product data is going to be in different formats and use different labels. Your PIM solution should help you

- **Standardize:** Harmonizes the data, which is likely in different formats in each of the different source systems (see Chapter 3 for more information)
- **Categorize:** Allows you to flexibly create categories and families of products
- **Organize:** Configures the catalog for different channels, languages, and so on

  REMEMBER

  Catalog flexibility is critically important to handle the many different ways your products can be categorized for use in different channels and locales. The catalog should also natively support handling product models and variants.

Figure 4-2 shows you a t-shirt available in different color and size combinations. The t-shirt varies on two levels but still retains (inherits) common attributes (descriptors like red or blue and cotton or polyester) from the product model at the top. The common attributes in the product models flow down to the size variants, meaning the red t-shirts are all 100 percent cotton, whereas the blue t-shirts are a cotton polyester blend.
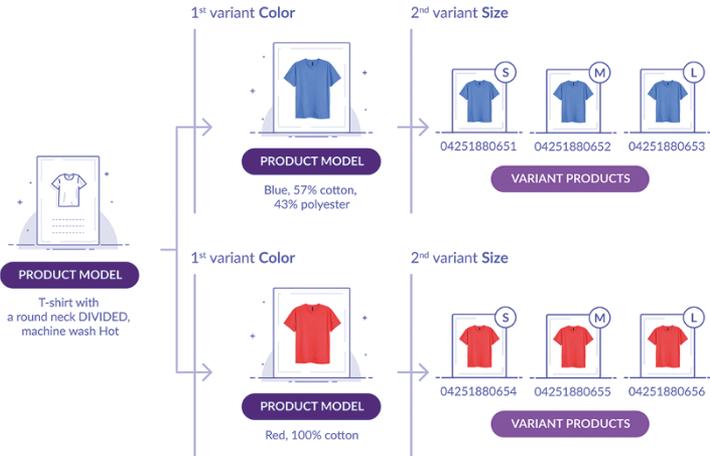
FIGURE 4-2: PIM support for product models and variants.

PIM should have the flexibility to inherit attributes from product models so your marketing team doesn't have to discretely manage every attribute at every level, which consumes vast amounts of resources and time. Additionally, your PIM solution should make it easy to create associations between products in your catalog. For example, you may want to create an association between t-shirts and jeans, and jeans with belts and other accessories. This makes it easy to define relationships like an alternative product or a substitution between products.

Rules engine and enrichment

A PIM tool should make life easier for the marketing team, but if the team is simply doing manual effort in a different place, the productivity gains are reduced. You need to look for a PIM tool that offers automation to help set product attribute values and leaves the more creative work to your marketers. This feature gives you the time to write the emotional descriptions and select the correct imagery to deliver the best product experience possible.

When standardizing attribute values across many products, PIM should include a business rules engine that can assign values based on a rule specified by a marketer. This removes the need to manually edit individual fields for every product, making the process much more efficient and productive.

A good PIM solution also allows you to run operations in bulk, so a change to an attribute common across many products, a family of products, or a category can be accomplished in one touch of a button. Support for bulk actions and a rules engine can eliminate a lot of manual work and contribute to marketer efficiency and productivity.

Another enrichment capability that helps create a better experience is support for reference entities — that is, managing data that isn't product data, but is related to it. Examples of reference entities include designers, looks, rooms, brands, ingredients, care instructions, manufacturers, colors, and more.

Look for a PIM solution that can manage reference entities alongside products so you can ensure a more complete experience across your channels.

Manage digital assets with products

A compelling product experience includes attractive images, videos, and documents. Your PIM solution should include the ability to manage and transform the digital assets associated with your products or integrate with a separate DAM system.

Provide insight into data quality

Part of a great product experience is ensuring the product data is accurate and of high quality. A PIM tool provides a central place to assemble your product data, and ideally it should also help determine your current level of data quality and provide suggestions on how to improve it. So, look for a PIM tool that measures data quality and consistency, offers improvement suggestions, and monitors data quality over time. Not only does this help create better product experiences, but also you'll be able to better assess and report the PIM's contribution to delivering high-quality data.

Validation workflow

With PIM, you can make sure your product information is as accurate as possible. You want a PIM solution that helps you manage the process and drives validation so product data is reviewed and ready for publication. This feature is particularly important if you have several teams working in the PIM tool on a given product. Validation workflow allows you to boost collaboration while maintaining control over the process and the quality of your product data.

Manage catalog completeness

You never want to publish any catalog that's missing required product information. Look for a PIM solution that measures the completeness of your catalog and presents it in a dashboard. This process helps focus your team on only reviewing and addressing products that are incomplete or need to be translated into other languages to support local markets and cross-border commerce. Focusing the team's efforts reduces time hunting for issues and allows you to easily monitor and predict when your catalog will be ready to be published.

Manage translations and localizations

To grow your business through cross-border commerce, translating your catalog is important and PIM should connect to translation systems. However, it's only part of the process to produce a catalog that's localized by market or region. Your assortment may differ in different locales, and the images you use may also be different. A PIM tool that can localize your catalog by region and handle the specific requirements for each channel is critical to ensuring your products are contextualized for each market.

REMEMBER

Localization is more than translations. It's about adapting your product information to local norms and regulations.

Manage users, roles, and permissions

As your catalog grows and as you manage multiple channels, you're going to have a larger team of people using PIM — perhaps separated by product line, or by the e-commerce team and the print team. To make it simple to control access, make sure your PIM solution can group users by their roles, and assign permissions to those roles and groups.

Make sure you can control privileges at the attribute level and even support a single sign-on login scheme to make it easy to grant access to the PIM tool from a central directory.

Manage catalog versions

Sometimes it's helpful to be able to restore prior versions of your catalog and to get an audit trail of changes over time made by different PIM users. Look for this feature in your PIM solution to help ensure good governance and recovery if ever needed.

Control over publication is useful when you want to have one version of the catalog that's live and another that's used for work in progress to create a specialty catalog or to simply begin working on a new, updated version of a product.

Distribute your catalog

After you enrich, complete, and localize your catalog, it's ready to be distributed to your e-commerce platform, marketplaces, and all the other channels where you're present. Look for a PIM tool that's highly connected and offers a robust ecosystem of extensions and connectors so publishing your finished catalog and images is fast and seamless.

Benefitting from a PIM

The direct benefits of using a PIM solution include

>> **Enhancing the customer experience:** You can't deliver a great customer experience without a compelling product experience. Customers expect a great experience no matter what touchpoint they use to interact with a retailer or a brand, whether it's business-to-customer (B2C) or business-to-business (B2B). Furthermore, millennials, the generation that grew up doing everything online, are gaining purchasing power. Because they're used to quick access to information, they expect a seamless experience across channels. Your product information needs to keep pace with those expectations.

>> **Delivering high-quality product data:** If your product information is incorrect, you risk the likelihood of someone buying it and then being dissatisfied. No one wants to buy a product that doesn't match the information in the catalog. Ensuring high-quality product information increases conversions and reduces returns, which is always good for your business.

>> **Establishing one source of truth:** Because PIM centralizes your product information, you have a much easier way to manage all your product data and make sure it's complete and accurate. From this central hub, it's much easier to control and distribute high-quality information to your channels.

Gone are the days of having to manually optimize product catalogs across multiple platforms. Use the PIM tool as a system of record that can be put in context for each channel. It shouldn't be uniform, but it needs to be consistent and correct.

>> **Simplifying the onboarding process for suppliers and data providers:** For retailers, distributors, and wholesalers, suppliers are frequently a key source of product information. But collecting information from suppliers typically consists of a series of emails, phone calls, and exchanging spreadsheets that must be manually imported into your PIM tool.

TIP

Look for a PIM solution that offers product data onboarding capabilities to ease the process of collecting and standardizing product information from your suppliers, who should be the authoritative source of technical information. With a supplier interface, you can greatly simplify, speed up, and more easily control incorporating supplier product data without the pain associated with collating spreadsheets or manually rekeying data into your PIM tool.

>> **Increasing team productivity:** PIM can bring automation to your catalog management processes, as well as a level of control and governance. With PIM, your team can do more in less time, which leads to greater efficiency and productivity.

>> **Accelerating time-to-market:** If your business relies on a frequently changing product assortment to remain competitive, you're going to need a solution that allows you to get your products to market quickly. This point is particularly

important to meet the latest trends and to be well-prepared for the seasonal buying season. PIM's automation and control over catalog management processes means your catalogs can be ready to market much faster compared to manual alternatives.

» **Delivering consistent product information in context:** Putting product data in context means ensuring it's fit for use in the channel where your product catalog will be used and how your buyers will interact with it. As your business grows and you recognize opportunities for growth in new markets, you may get to a point where you want to engage in cross-border commerce — that is, selling your product to buyers in different countries.

If you already operate in multiple locales, you know the need to translate and localize your product catalog. A good PIM tool enables you to manage your catalog in your native language, as well as other languages, and makes it easier to accommodate different standards, measurements, regulations, and even images that are appropriate for other locales.

TIP

Consistency is another key benefit. Regardless of where customers interact with your product, it's critical that you provide consistent information at each touchpoint. PIM can help ensure you create and distribute a consistent experience wherever your buyers see your products.

REMEMBER

No one product experience rules them all, and your catalog needs to reflect the right product experience in the appropriate place. Use your PIM solution to make sure your products are using the right standards, right language, and appropriate cultural norms.

Chapter **5**

Discovering a Digital Asset Management Solution

A s your product catalog grows, you need to manage a large amount of digital assets, such as images, videos, audio, and documents. If you tried to manage them manually, you would quickly become overwhelmed. That's where a Digital Asset Management (DAM) solution comes in. It creates a database that becomes your single source of truth for these digital assets.

In this chapter, you look at how DAM works, see how it makes your team more productive, and discover how it ensures your assets are up-to-date and correct across channels.

Learning How DAM Works

A typical DAM system works to organize your digital media in a certain way. Take a look at the digital asset life cycle:

1. **Create:** The cycle begins by creating a plan to develop your asset in a digital format.

2. **Manage:** Establish guidelines for approvals and versioning transfers and access. To manage your files, you can put them into a category structure and then assign relevant keywords.

3. **Distribute:** Share relevant data between internal departments, third-party online shops, apps, print media, or product databases.

An effective DAM system automatically calculates the appropriate file format for output.

4. **Retrieve:** After all the files reside in one central location, search and find anything you need. No matter what kind of data you're looking for, you can find it in seconds.

5. **Archive:** Due to the sheer number of media, it's important to periodically separate important from unimportant data. Archiving data allows you to access assets and related documentation at any time.

This process is shown in Figure 5-1.
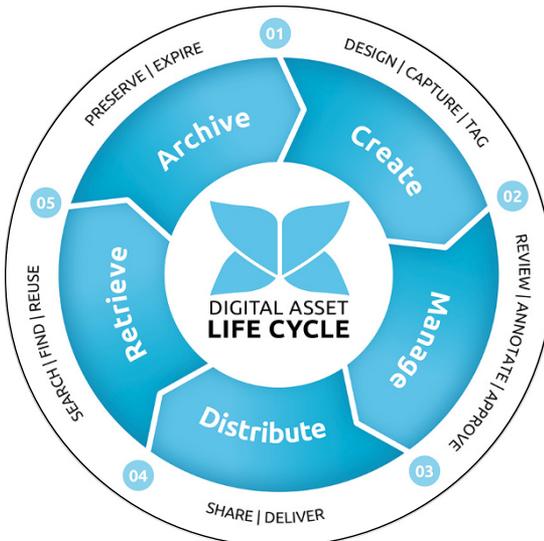
FIGURE 5-1: The digital asset life cycle.

A DAM solution provides the ability to generate and preview the managed assets like the ones seen in Figure 5-2. This eliminates the time-consuming processes of downloading and opening. Therefore, in addition to the metadata of an asset, you also have a quick visual decision criterion.
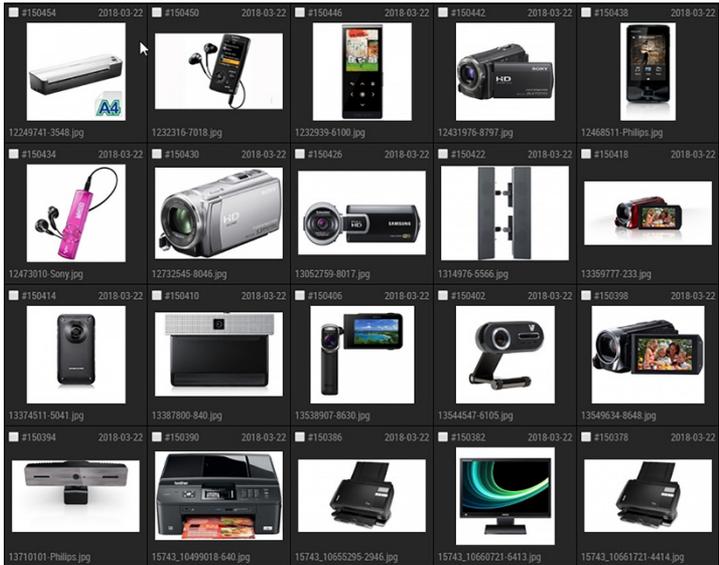
FIGURE 5-2: An assets preview.

Benefitting from DAM

A DAM solution is a centralized tool that manages all kinds of files in the product life cycle. It guarantees that you have consistent product content across all channels. A DAM also provides many benefits to your organization. In this section, you discover the benefits that have a huge impact on your business.

Improving operational efficiency

A DAM ensures that your assets are accessible to all your team members. Therefore, team members can work independently at any location and don't have to worry about errors due to outdated data. A DAM ensures that the most up-to-date content is always available.

Increasing marketing productivity

A DAM requires less research effort because it enables users to create efficient search queries to save time. Laborious searches on various sources are no longer necessary. Coordination between different departments is enhanced.

Reducing costs

All staff can access digital assets regardless of device, time, or location. This saves you money and eliminates the need to use less secure cloud storage for data exchange. You also won't have to rely on slow and unstable virtual private network (VPN) connections.

Creating a shorter marketing cycle

Changes to your digital assets are made from a central database so they don't need to be executed multiple times. The change in each different channel is automatic and doesn't need to be communicated and distributed to all involved, significantly reducing time to market.

Increasing security and compliance

Protecting your digital assets is critical. You want to ensure that users who shouldn't have access to certain files are prevented from modifying them. A DAM provides granular rights and role management that protect your data. It also provides for multi-level approval processes that increase data quality.

Optimization of media content

Your DAM solution ensures that your content is optimized and helps you find out which media best addresses your customers' needs. You can determine whether an existing asset is still valuable and can continue to generate profits.

Providing more effective brand experiences

A DAM tool ensures that you deploy only correct brand assets. This creates a customer experience consistent across all channels.

Looking at Must-Have Features

A DAM has some excellent benefits and features. This section gives you the must-haves that make a DAM system fast and easy to use.

Find instead of search

When you use a DAM solution, you don't need to rely on your memory to "find" something in a folder. A good DAM tool offers a variety of search capabilities that allow you to type in any detail and easily retrieve digital assets, images, and videos.

TIP Make sure your DAM tool can search the file contents of PDFs and Office documents because these are common formats.

All formats in every size

With DAM, you can automatically save and convert your output data. For example, by using a Photoshop file, you can automatically generate a JPEG for your multimedia presentation, a PNG for the online store, and a TIFF for the print catalog to support modern omnichannel marketing.

Publishing to web portals

When you want to publish to a brand's web portal, you should be able to distribute in just a few clicks. You can offer files for download or create a secure link from which photographers can send you new photos. The files don't need to be uploaded to cloud services — they stay on your servers.

Version management

Keeping track of versions is important. A DAM system should help you to verify every file change. Look for a rollback option that allows you to access and restore previous versions to prevent mistakes.

Workflow management

An effective DAM system supports workflow management. Workflow helps ease the process of managing digital assets and should provide notifications when status changes. Workflow helps

collaboration when internal studio teams or external service providers are involved in providing your digital asset files.

Roles and permissions

Like any system that manages data, managing roles and permissions is critical for security. You should be able to easily decide who can see and edit files and control the specific permissions by individual user role. That way, you protect your system and data from being accessed by inappropriate third parties.

Related data structures

A good DAM system allows you to manage complex metadata in stand-alone database tables and relate them to your assets. This feature enables you to easily manage relationships between products, variations, and suppliers so they can be effectively linked and searched. This is important because it helps you manage a complex search query as well as rename and export items to customer and/or merchant numbers.

Improving Customer Interactions by Using DAM

You need rich media content to deliver a compelling product experience that will give you a competitive advantage. The following sections suggest some rich media types your business should deploy.

Social media posts

You need a social media strategy to support the increasing number of social media channels that pop up each day. This helps you reach your customers wherever they are.

It has been proven that rich media increases the reach of a post and increases viral spread.

Promotional posts

Video is one of the most compelling formats a brand can deploy because it has an emotional component. This medium is becoming increasingly relevant as the number of devices and connectivity continues to increase.

Interactive manuals

Interactive manuals show your customer what your products look like and give them ideas about how they can use them.

References

Testimonials from real people using your products give potential customers the social proof that they need to consider buying your product.

Webinars

Webinars give your customers a chance to see how the product works and to ask questions in real time. They can assess whether you seem trustworthy enough to buy from.

Looking at DAM System Types

DAM systems can be divided into cloud, local, and hybrid solutions. I detail each type in this section.

Cloud DAM

Many organizations choose cloud systems for a multitude of reasons. Cloud DAM solutions have the following characteristics:

» The systems are hosted over the web and can be used from anywhere in the world.

» Vendors supply upgrades, maintenance, and backups remotely.

» They're fast and easy to deploy.

>> They're easier to scale.

>> Licensing is typically a monthly or annual subscription fee.

>> Access is easy for partners and vendors.

>> An in-house server infrastructure isn't required.

On-premises DAM

An on–premises DAM solution can be a local version that main–tains the following features:

>> In-house IT management and maintenance are required.

>> System backups are necessary, and the customers are responsible for them.

>> Local systems support customization.

>> For features in local systems, you often have to pay.

>> DAM users can work independently even without an internet connection.

Hybrid DAM

The hybrid DAM system is a combination of a cloud and a local version that has the following features:

>> In-house IT management and maintenance are required.

>> Vendors are responsible for upgrades and maintenance, and backups are performed remotely.

>> Local systems support customization.

>> Initial budget requirements are often lower.

>> Users can work without being fully dependent on the internet.

>> They're easier to access for partners and vendors from the internet.

Choosing Your DAM Solution

Choosing a DAM solution can be a challenging process. To help make your decision easier, keep in mind the following considerations:

- **» Understand your content.** It's important to review all your content. Concentrate on valuable content.
- **» Look at system requirements.** Think about the users, the infrastructure, and the business you're working with. These factors are key when finding a solution.
- **» Consider business requirements.** Identify the challenges you want to resolve with a DAM.

Chapter **6**

Understanding a Product Content Syndication Solution

Would you like to sell your products through unowned online retail channels? Product Content Syndication (PCS) software can get you there. Product data is now playing a revolutionary role in the customer journey. Many new retail opportunities and ways to sell and advertise products exist online. Each one has different data requirements. According to Forrester Research, an average customer visits at least 14 different channels before making a purchase. You need to be where your customers are.

In this chapter, you discover the value that PCS can bring to your organization and how it can help you provide the right content in the right context across every customer touchpoint.

Learning about PCS Solutions

Pairing your Product Information Management (PIM) solution with both a Digital Asset Management (DAM) solution and a PCS solution provides a more complete Product Experience

Management (PXM) solution. I discuss PIM in Chapter 4 and DAM in Chapter 5.

Adding a PCS solution to your technology stack helps you break through the digital walls that surround today's businesses. A capable PCS solution equips you with the tools necessary to overcome the typical barriers faced in getting your products to market. This allows you to get all your product data on all of your channels in the right format and the right context.

Effective PCS helps you streamline three main processes:

>> Preparing your product data feed for any channel

>> Collecting missing or value-adding product information

>> Integrating with your retail and shopping channels

Your data, after it's optimized, has the following characteristics:

>> **High quality:** It's clean, complete, enriched, and accurate.

>> **Customized:** It's validated, structured, and tailored to the unique format of each channel.

>> **Contextualized:** It's unified but not uniform, making sure your key product facts like price and size are consistent but your message has been adapted to the channel.

Reviewing today's trends and challenges with PCS

Today, four key trends shape the e-commerce landscape. All of them provide you with new opportunities to sell your products, improve the shopping experience, expand your reach, and sell more. They are

>> A growing number of channels

>> An increasing complexity of channels

>> Constantly changing data feed requirements

>> New technologies

One key requirement that will affect your success is a fast response to market changes.

As the e-commerce landscape becomes more complex, you may run into some challenges if you don't equip yourself with the right tools to prepare for them. These challenges include

» **Lost revenue from disapproved products:** Channels constantly update their product data feed requirements. If you don't change your feed accordingly, your products may not be accepted, and your products won't be listed or advertised on the given channel, which directly impacts your revenue. Be in the know and adapt quickly. The longer it takes to fix errors, the more revenue you lose. Using a PCS solution prevents this from being an issue.

» **Loss of new revenue from missed opportunities:** If your processes are inefficient and you're not agile enough to quickly adapt to new opportunities, your competition will beat you to it. By the time you catch up, the market may be oversaturated, or the next opportunity will already be available and you won't be able to keep up.

» **High running costs:** Companies who don't use content automation or who rely on technical support spend too much time and money waiting for data edits to be implemented and consequently waste resources.

Discovering who needs PCS

If you're wondering if a PCS solution is right for you, see if you answer yes to any of the following questions:

» Do you deal with large product data sets containing thousands or even millions of items?

» Do you have highly complex feed setups or business requirements?

» Do you seek advanced data optimization to unlock your products' hidden potential and help them stand out?

» Do you want to publish products in multiple regions, retail outlets, shopping channels, or marketplaces?

If you answered yes to any of the above, you should consider getting a PCS solution that meets your needs.

Looking at Must-Have PCS Features

When you consider a PCS solution, you may be wondering what you need (and what you don't). This section details some must-have features you should be aware of.

Global connectivity

With so many channels now available and more being launched all the time, a capable PCS solution should easily integrate with the global matrix of sales and marketing channels, such as the following

» All major classical retailers (online or offline), such as Walmart, Target, and Home Depot

» Search and social channels, such as Google, Bing, Facebook, or Pinterest

» Marketplaces and comparison-shopping engines, such as Amazon, NexTag, and Shopping.com

» Retargeting and affiliate ad networks, such as Criteo, AWIN, and Tradedoubler

» Marketing automation technologies, such as Salesforce, Marin Software, and Kenshoo

» On-site search technologies, such as Celebros

Review the channels you're going to need and make sure your solution provider is set up to specifically connect to them.

Channel-readiness assessment and data quality analysis

Look for a PCS solution that provides a smart feature that scans your entire data feed in seconds to identify critical errors and improvement potential. Such a feature helps you optimize and transform your product content to meet the requirements of any channel.

One example of this smart feature is shown in Figure 6-1 where you can see a retailer's product data feed. The image depicts the following:

>> The rows display all the different products in inventory.

>> The columns contain the products' values for the various product attributes, such as image, title, description, color, and so on.

>> The pie charts are analysis results of the data according to specific requirements of the e-commerce channel in question. Below each chart the identified error is listed. This error may be anything from HTML tags being included or double whitespaces to incorrect pricing formats or missing values.
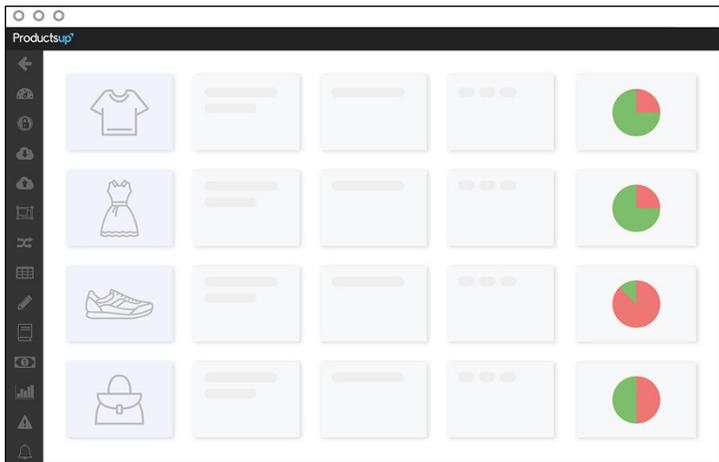

FIGURE 6-1: Product data analysis and health check.

Bulk data edits and a real-time preview

Your PCS solution should allow you to not only edit your data in bulk but also cross–check your edits with an instant preview. Editing in bulk is the only way you can efficiently enhance large feeds containing millions of different products.

But, if you can't see what the data looks like after you've assigned a rule to edit it, you have no chance of knowing if you've achieved the desired result. In turn, you may send incorrect or wrongly formatted content to your channel and get an error message say– ing your products have been disapproved. This wastes valuable time and energy and is easily avoided with a visual preview of your data.

To help you understand your product data even better, some PCS solutions have also integrated a preview of what your product ad will look like on the specific channel in question.

Integrated best practice recommendations

To save time and resources, your PCS solution should automatically provide a set of recommended data edits based on a data feed audit. With a feature like this, you should be able to click once in order to apply the edit across all your affected products.

Multiple data sources for data enrichment and insight

A capable PCS platform should also have integrations to a large variety of data sources, from the most popular ecommerce platforms such as Magento, to PIM software like Akeneo, and to third-party data suppliers. You should be able to combine these multiple data sources into a single, easily manageable "master" data feed. This process helps you gain valuable insights, enrich your feed with missing attributes like product images or GTINs (unique product identity numbers), and optimize your feed for each specific channel. Some of the typical source systems to the PCS platform include

- » e-commerce platforms
- » PIM systems
- » DAM systems
- » Analytics
- » Competitor pricing
- » B.I. and analytics
- » Third-party suppliers
- » Ratings and reviews

Code-free data management

Find a solution that doesn't require you to know how to code. You should be able to edit and map your data at the click of a button, using drag-and-drop logic. You shouldn't have to rely on your IT

department to edit your data. This will save you time and stream-line your processes. In addition, by self-managing your product feeds, you will know exactly what's going on with your product data. The better you understand your data, the more control you have. In the end, this will give you the power to unlock the rev-enue generating potential of your product data feeds.

Leverage AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) features can be useful to streamline the PCS process. Two key areas for AI include

» **Natural language detection:** With natural language detection functionality, you can automatically populate empty fields by extracting product attributes from product descriptions as shown in Figure 6-2.

» **Product image recognition:** This capability enables you to understand the visual content of feeds and detect and automatically extract colors or objects in product images, as shown in Figure 6-3, to populate the information in empty data fields.
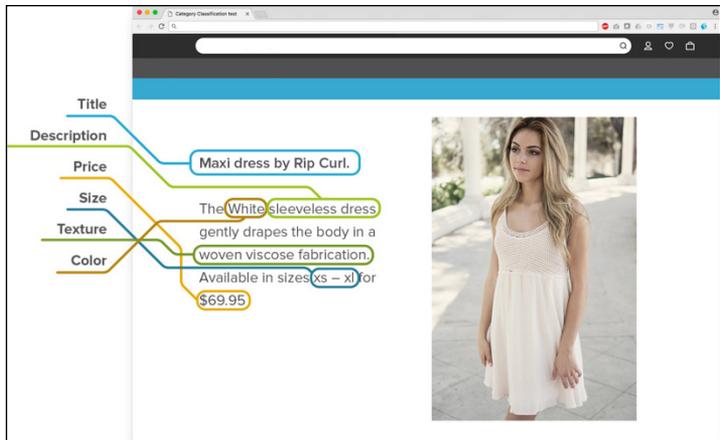

**FIGURE 6-2:** Auto text extraction from product description and title.
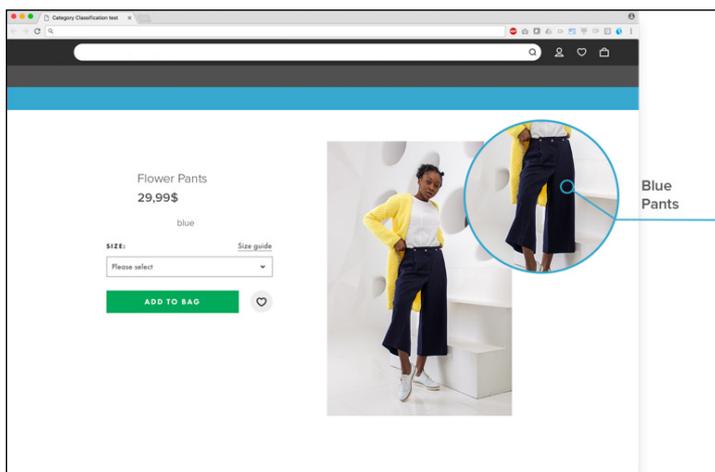
FIGURE 6-3: Auto color detection from product image.

Rich media capabilities

A PCS that lets you optimize and adapt your product images to suit the individual export channels will take your product experience management to the next level. On one search engine, for example, you need to supply images on a white background, with no additional information on the image so that shoppers can get a clear image of the product. However, on certain social media sites, you need to capture the attention of a user who didn't go on that site with the intention to shop.

In that situation, you need to deliver engaging, eye-catching graphics. This may include promotional messages like "Free shipping" or "50 percent sale" plus a brand logo and a description like "organic" or "100 percent cotton." If you take this further by showing a video of your product in use, you can engage your audience even more and be able to run campaigns through online video channels.

A good PCS solution helps you create fun and beautiful image templates that enhance all your product images in one go. A great PCS solution takes this a step further and lets you dynamically create personalized and engaging product videos. Figure 6-4 is an example of a product image being enhanced with the product price and a call-to-action.
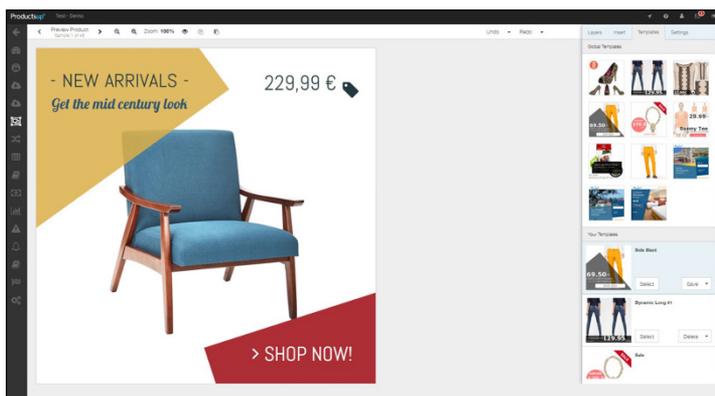
FIGURE 6-4: An example of a customized image template.

Benefitting from a PCS Solution

TIP

When you use a high-quality, modern PCS solution, you derive the following benefits:

» **Get your products to market faster.** You save time and effort with integrated channel templates, automated distribution, and bulk edits.

» **Adapt fast and stay relevant.** With an agile approach to product data, you're geared to capture new market opportunities as they happen.

» **Minimize complexity.** A PCS tool makes it easy for you to edit your data. It has replaced the need for coding skills with a visual interface. This means you can edit your data using intuitive drag-and-drop logic.

» **Drive product visibility and sales.** With beautiful product images and product content that's unified — but not uniform — across all digital touchpoints, you'll attract buyers, build consumer trust, and boost performance.

» **Scale your business.** Reach new markets and sell internationally.

» **Tell a consistent story.** Reach customers with unified messages that are contextualized across all channels.

DISCOVERING WHAT YOUR CUSTOMERS WANT

Everything you do for your end customer relates to providing the most relevant product information. Customers have specific needs. A survey of retailers to find out more about the end customer revealed the following:

- **Customers are well-informed and time poor.** Potential customers research products they're interested in but don't have endless time to devote to finding things; they expect immediate answers.

- **Customers are used to easy usability.** They want links sent about relevant products that make the shopping experience more convenient and enjoyable. One example may be a link to a pair of sneakers they would enjoy.

- **Customers are increasingly passive.** They want information available to them on any device they happen to be using.

- **Customers are socially dependent.** They chat with people from all over the world and look at reviews and recommendations before they make a purchase choice.

- **Customers are driven by user experience and personalization.** People want their experiences to be unique and relevant to them.

Are you ready for the future of shopping? Does this list sound like your customers? Probably. But remember that this is only the current mindset of your prospective customers. Things are continually changing. You can be sure that in five years, shopping will have completely changed again. Such developments as the Internet of Things, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and self-driving cars will change how, when, and where we shop.

And then there is the future of screenless shopping — shopping you do at home (or elsewhere) by telling your personal voice assistant to order your products for you. Are you preparing to accommodate those channels, too? Are you agile enough to adapt easily and structure your product data for these channels? Your Product Experience Management practice and tools can help you be better prepared for these new types of B2C shopping and B2B buying habits.

Chapter **7**

Ten Keys to Successful PXM Practices

No one Product Experience Management (PXM) tool can deliver the complete set of functionalities you need to create great product experiences out of the box. The tools can help, but you also need guidelines and best practices. Putting the pieces together to execute a successful PXM strategy requires that you look at the big picture.

This chapter gives you ten keys to successful PXM practices.

Collect Product Data from Reliable Sources

Your raw product data exists in many different systems and formats across your organization. Some raw data may even come from external sources such as suppliers.

TIP

To ensure you start with the best possible data, evaluate where your current product data resides and decide which are the most reliable and highest quality sources. Use these sources to populate your catalog in your Product Information Management (PIM)

solution where it will be standardized and enriched. See Chapter 4 for more details.

Supplement Technical Product Data with Usage Data

Enhance product pages with relevant content that helps buyers understand the product and make informed decisions. To create a great product experience, you should include more than just technical facts. Create a vision of how to use your product so buyers can envision themselves benefitting from it. See Chapter 4 for more information.

Use High-Quality Images, Video, and Other Digital Assets

To create emotion and a vision for customers, include relevant photos, video, and documents that show products in context. For example, in addition to a picture of a folded bedspread, include a picture of it on the bed — perhaps with matching pillows. See Chapter 5 for more details.

Research Differences by Market

When marketing your products in different locales, be sure to research cultural norms, sensitivities, and local regulations. You need to ensure that you're using the right descriptions, images, units of measure, and so on.

For example, do buyers look for metric or imperial units? What regulatory compliance information do you need to include for different states, provinces, or countries? Plan your catalog structure accordingly to meet requirements and deliver a relevant product experience in each region. Chapter 4 contains more information on this subject.

Create a Holistic, Full-Fledged Channel Strategy

Different channels require different product information. For example, you need a shorter, more readable description for a voice assistant. Consider input from a Product Content Syndication (PCS) tool to ensure robust coverage in marketplaces, social channels, and more. See Chapter 6 for more details on PCS.

Leverage PXM Process Automation

Automate low value, repetitive tasks to free up your marketing and e-commerce teams to work on high-value tasks such as crafting emotive product descriptions. See Chapters 4, 5, and 6 for information on where automation can help streamline processes and make your teams more productive.

Foster Cross-Functional Collaboration

To succeed in your omnichannel strategy, don't work in silos. Share your data, be transparent across teams, and coordinate your commerce strategy across all your merchandising and commerce teams.

Track Performance

Measure your conversions and return rates. Adjust your PXM strategy and content as required to maximize results from your commerce and business objectives. Also, remember to track your team's productivity improvements, too.

Remember That Context is King!

No one product experience rules them all. You should contextualize your product information to deliver a relevant and compelling experience at every customer touchpoint. See Chapters 4, 5, and 6 for more information on capabilities necessary to make sure you put your product information in context.

Think of PXM as a Journey

PXM doesn't stop when a purchase is made. It continues through the entire customer journey, through more personalization, engagement, upsells, and so on. Keep refining your PXM processes and product content to keep pace with the rapidly changing ways buyers interact with you.

Where are you on the path to unlocking growth through **PXM?**

Take our PXM Maturity Assessment and find out!

PXM MATURITY ASSESSMENT

Get a personalized report on how your PXM processes, technology, and teams compare to others.

Take the assessment

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Deliver irresistible product experiences

The world of commerce is rapidly evolving. With more channels for reaching customers, delivering a consistently great customer experience everywhere is a must, which requires crafting compelling product experiences — consistent product information delivered in context wherever, and whomever, your buyers are. Retailers and brands who go beyond delivering simple product information and build an emotional connection with customers will win. Welcome to the new profession of Product Experience Management!

Inside…

- Understanding the experience economy
- Crafting compelling product experiences
- Learning the product information flow
- Putting product information in context
- Creating emotion with digital assets
- Tackling product content syndication
- Building a successful PXM practice

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