

Akeneo Global B2B Survey 2020

5 Takeaways on the Rising Importance of Product Experience

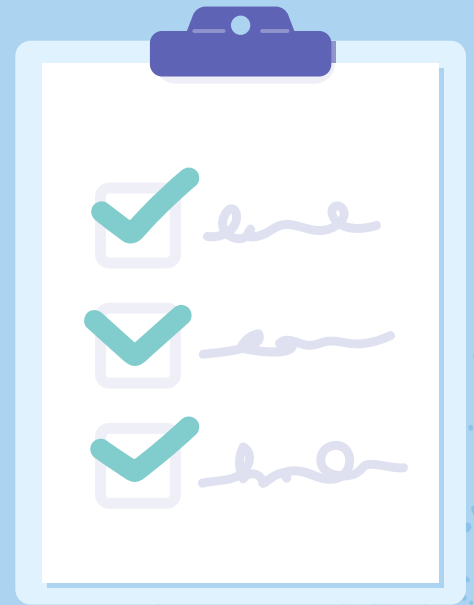


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Introduction

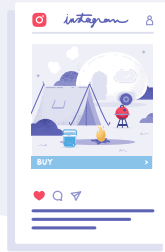
Welcome to the Akeneo Global B2B Survey 2020: The Rising Importance of Product Experience!

At the start of this year (before the COVID-19 pandemic changed all our lives and accelerated the need for digital transformation), we set out to understand the state of product information and product experience in 2020. How important is product information to B2B businesses of all shapes and sizes? How are these companies managing their product information in the omnichannel age? What challenges are they facing? Why do they care about product information management? Which geographic regions are leading the way when it comes to product information management, and which are falling behind?

To get the answers to these questions, we surveyed 1,600 professionals involved in B2B commerce in industries including consumer goods, food and drink, retail, construction, manufacturing, automotive, healthcare, and more. We spoke to C-suite executives, eCommerce managers, marketing professionals, IT managers, and more, located in Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S.

So what did we learn from all of these product information professionals? Read on to find out!





- 1 -

Product Experience is Critical for a Satisfying Customer Experience

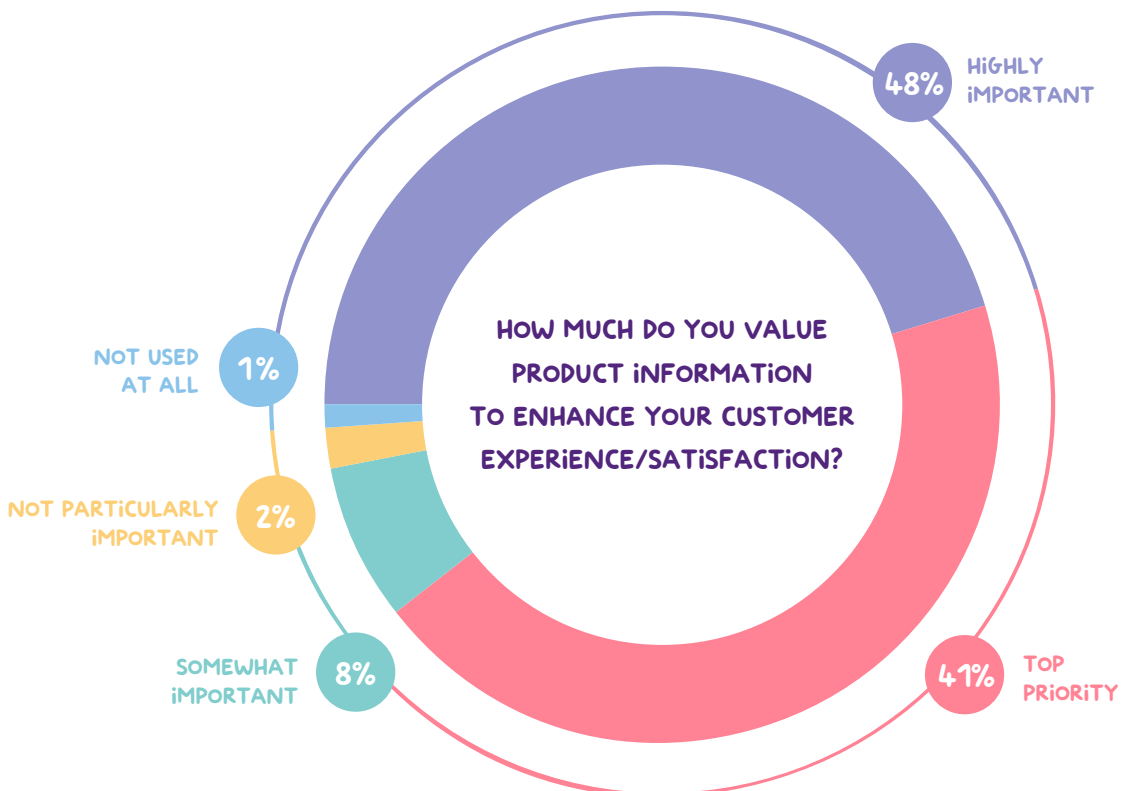
The biggest takeaway from our survey was simple – the vast majority of B2B businesses consider high-quality product information a must-have for success in the omnichannel age.

What's more, this information isn't only used to enrich online stores or printed catalogs – it's utilized across the board. **Almost all of the organizations surveyed (95%) said that they use product data for marketing campaigns, social media posts, or other communication with customers.**



97%

of manufacturers and distributors alike cite product information as a key asset to enhance their customer experience.





61%

of respondents cite product and brand value information as the #1 purchasing criterion after price

B2B companies have a good reason for putting this level of importance on product information. Product and brand value information have become the leading purchasing criteria following price, with 61% of respondents citing it as a major impact on purchasing decisions. This includes information about the origin, organic materials, manufacturer social responsibility, carbon footprint, and more. Nearly half of respondents also cited personalized experiences as a key part of their decision-making process.

Apart from the price, what do you think are your buyers' key purchasing criteria when making decisions about buying your type of products/services?



AKENEO TIP

With this rise of new purchasing criteria such as corporate values, delivering a product experience has become a critical component of the buying experience. Telling a brand story and sharing values through detailed information including the origin of the product, the production process, and certification labels are becoming increasingly important. This means that distributors and manufacturers must deliver not only technical and usage information but also emotional product information, including digital assets, to meet customers' expectations.



CUSTOMER HIGHLIGHT

European high-quality lighting solution producer **SLV** brightened up its customers' buying experience by being one of the first to depict their lighting products in an environment so customers could easily see how SLV products add ambiance and style. They also unveiled a mobile app to allow customers to access product information – all of which SLV accomplished by using Akeneo PIM to deliver complete and accurate product data while reducing product enrichment effort by 80%.



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Omnichannel is King and Online Channels are Queen

Another clear takeaway from the opinions held by B2B stakeholders interviewed as part of this survey? We're firmly in the golden age of the omnichannel distribution strategy.

The number of channels that companies sell on is continuing to grow. While many manufacturers and distributors (38%) still have physical brick-and-mortar locations, **nearly 50% of all surveyed B2B companies cited eCommerce stores (48%), social media sales (44%), and online ads (44%) as their top channels for sales and distribution.** This survey also confirms the rise of marketplaces, as more than a third (36%) of respondents cite using these platforms, while almost one-third (28%) say they still offer print catalogs.



81%

More than three-quarters of respondents reported selling products through more than one channel.

WHICH CHANNELS DOES YOUR COMPANY/ORGANIZATION PROMOTE AND SELL ITS PRODUCTS THROUGH?

ECOMMERCE WEBSITES
i.E. SPECIFIC VENDORS WEBSITES

SOCIAL MEDIA

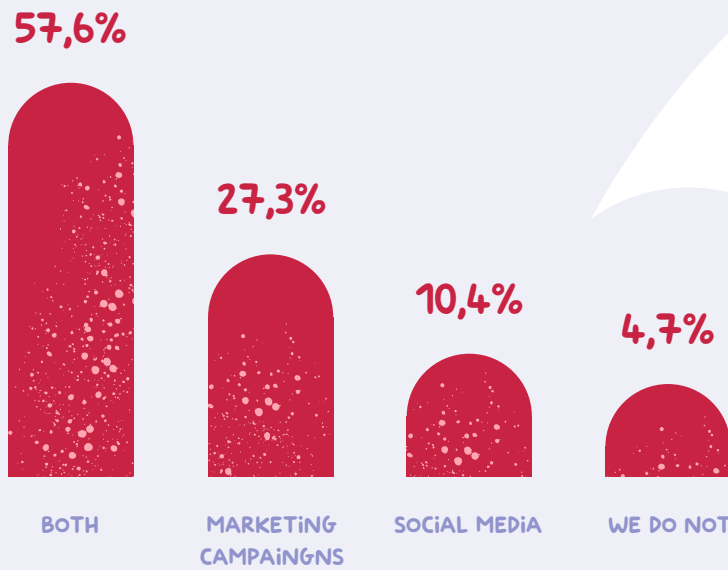
44%

48%

ONLINE ADS

44%

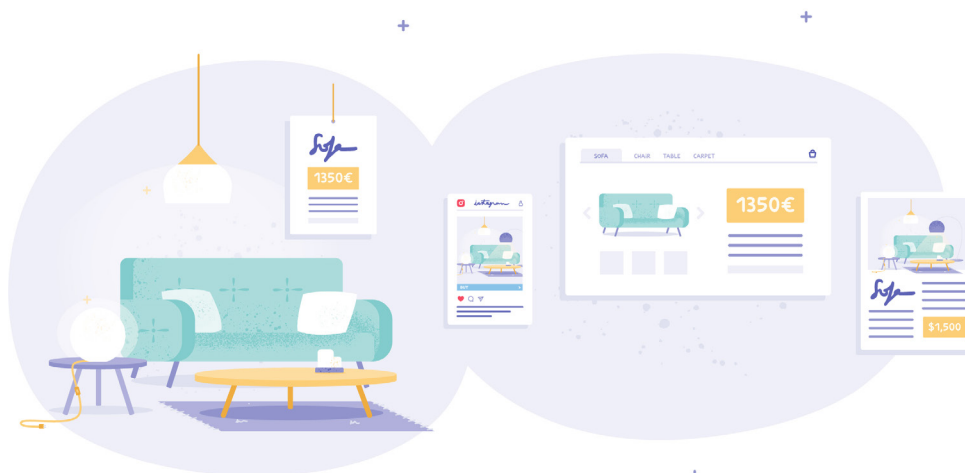
In addition, marketing promotion is becoming an increasingly important aspect of the customer experience. And, like many other areas of customer experience, a growing portion of these efforts are being made via digital channels. As B2B buyers continue to move online, marketers have looked to deliver a better product experience by offering consistency and contextualization across all promotional channels — **58% of the marketers we surveyed said they use product information for marketing campaigns and social media activities, while 37% said they use it for one of the two activities.**



DO YOU USE YOUR PRODUCT INFORMATION/DATA IN YOUR MARKETING CAMPAIGNS AND SOCIAL CHANNELS?

Contextualization, a must-do

This all highlights the growing importance of contextualization, especially multi-channel contextualization. As the number of channels continues to proliferate, it is essential that B2B businesses ensure that product information is tailored to a user’s channel, demographic, and physical location. Fortunately, this seems to be understood by B2B professionals, with **62% of survey respondents saying they adapt product content to match both the channel and locale their customers shop on.** Many marketers (31%), however, said they don’t find their current system used to create catalogs for various distribution channels satisfying, indicating that purpose-built solutions are needed.





93%

of respondents contextualize their product information to either channels or locales, or both.

61,8%



BOTH

22,8%



CHANNELS

8,7%



LOCALES

6,8%



WE DO NOT
ADAPT

DO YOU USE
YOUR PRODUCT
INFORMATION/DATA
IN YOUR MARKETING
CAMPAIGNS AND SOCIAL
CHANNELS?

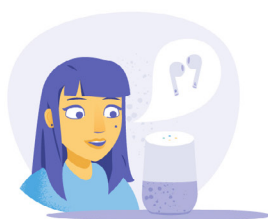


31%

of respondents said their current system used to create catalogs for various distribution channels is not satisfying.

New technologies considered

Meanwhile, one still-evolving area of optimizing product experience involves new technologies that could be used to enhance the customer experience. **More than half of respondents (53%) said they were considering the use of voice-controlled search technology, while 45% are considering chatbot features, and 39% are considering the use of AR or VR.** While the potential of these new platforms is certainly exciting, they also represent new channels and associated challenges for B2B businesses, further necessitating the need for purpose-built product information solutions.



DO YOU EXPECT YOUR ORGANIZATION TO IMPLEMENT ANY NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS TO IMPROVE YOUR CUSTOMER BUYING EXPERIENCE?

VOICE CONTROLLED SEARCH
TECHNOLOGY E.G. ALEXA

CHATBOT

44,8%

52,8%

AR / VR

39,3%

AKENEO TIP

Make sure you have a firm understanding of your customers' buying journeys and don't forget to put product information in the proper context for the locale and channels your customers are using. Cross-border and omnichannel purchases are on the rise, but if you want customers to identify with and relate to your brand, you'll need to speak their language, which means adapting and adjusting product data to meet their specific needs in addition to simply translating your content to other languages.



CUSTOMER HIGHLIGHT

Designing a picture-perfect product experience can be the difference between connecting with new customers and watching them flock to your competition. Global flooring manufacturer and seller [Tarkett](#), for example, experienced an increase in sales and revenue after renovating its product data management. Now customers can gain a full understanding of key product details, and achieve greater personalization by being able to visualize Tarkett flooring and wall covering solutions in a virtual room mockup.



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The Human Impact of Managing Product Experience

As digital channels have continued to multiply and diversify, so has the burden being carried by B2B teams involved in managing product information.

Functional organizations create product information management silos

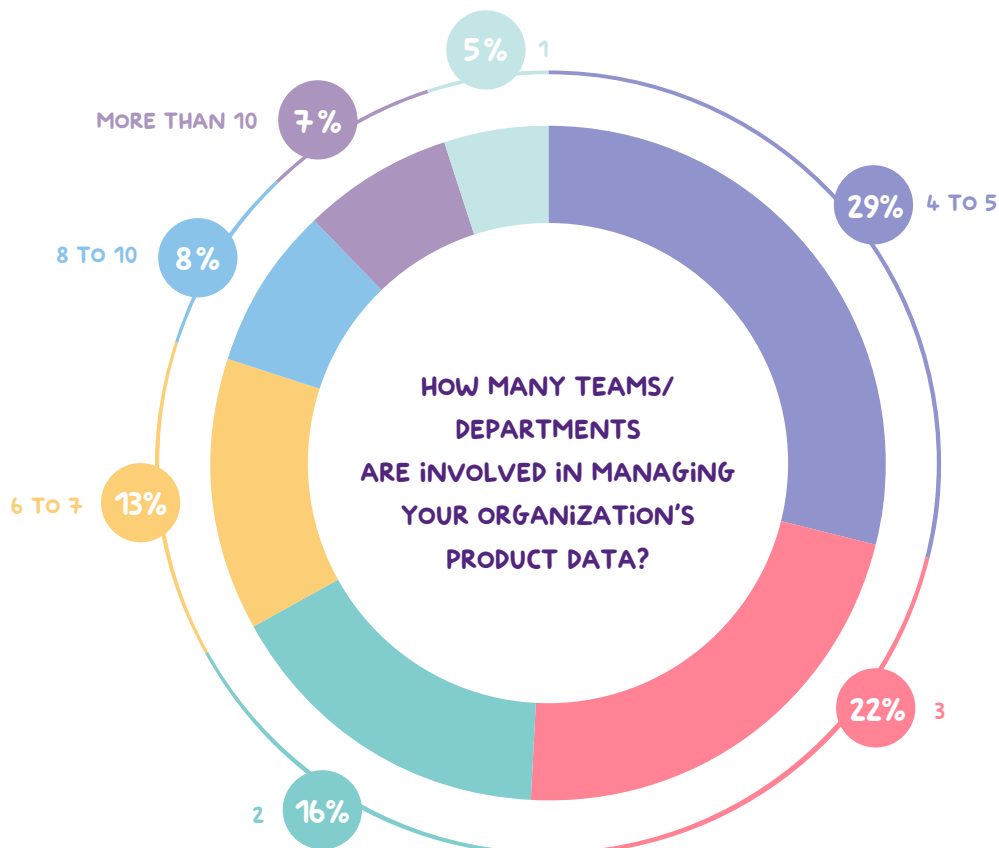
Most B2B organizations tend to have teams organized by channels, such as an eCommerce team, retail team, print team, social media team, and more.



57%

of surveyed organizations, including nearly two-thirds of eCommerce omnichannel managers (62%) said that at least four teams or departments were now involved in product information management.

This can make it more difficult for teams to work together smoothly, as 48% of respondents with more than four teams claim they struggle with efficient collaboration, compared to just 39% with fewer than four teams.



Five challenges

While most respondents recognize the need for compelling and accurate product information, they also admit facing five primary challenges in delivering an optimized product experience to the customers in a timely manner:

#1 Lack of team efficiency: Nearly half (45%) of respondents said this lack of efficiency is harming their productivity and slowing their time-to-market. Organizations that do not use a purpose-built solution to automate the highly repetitive tasks experience much lower levels of productivity.



#2 Timely product launches: 40% of respondents find it difficult to meet deadlines for new catalogs, product launches, and seasonal promotions, which can become a roadblock for successful expansion or company growth. Ability to adapt product assortments to shifting demand is becoming a priority for many businesses.



#3 Managing and enriching digital assets: Nearly four in ten (39%) state they have difficulties managing digital assets such as images, videos, and content to effectively merchandise products. What's more, nearly one-third (30%) are dissatisfied with their current solution's ability to enrich product data and manage digital assets. This is a major concern considering video and images are instrumental to delivering a compelling customer experience.



#4 Collecting and standardizing data: Thirty-seven percent of respondents have trouble standardizing product data within their organization, and 36% say they struggle to collect data into a central repository or "system of record" for product information. Organizations that do not properly standardize data from various internal and external sources often see higher levels of inaccuracies and inconsistencies in product information. Difficulties in collecting information can lead to a slower time-to-market.



#5 Manual data management processing. More than one-third (37%) still use spreadsheets to manage product data and roughly two-thirds rely on systems that they have to update manually. Companies that do not utilize a purpose-built Product Information Management solution to deal with these challenges expend significant manual effort to resolve these problems.



WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN CHALLENGES WITH MANAGING PRODUCT INFORMATION?



HOW DO YOU MANAGE PRODUCT INFORMATION i.E. INFORMATION MADE AVAILABLE TO YOUR CUSTOMERS TO HELP THEM MAKE A BUYING DECISION?



AKENEO TIP

Seek out a solution that is specifically designed to make managing product experience easier for any and all teams responsible for your product information. Find a solution that allows you to easily automate manual tasks, increase collaboration and efficiency, and deploy a “system of record for product information” to help speed time-to-market.



CUSTOMER HIGHLIGHT

Midland Scientific leverages the ease of use of Akeneo PIM to enrich product information for a growing catalog of laboratory equipment and supplies. By removing redundant efforts and showing the enrichment team a preview of a catalog view to focus their vision for a better product experience, Midland has reduced the per-SKU cost of product enrichment from \$5 to just \$1, a savings of 80%.

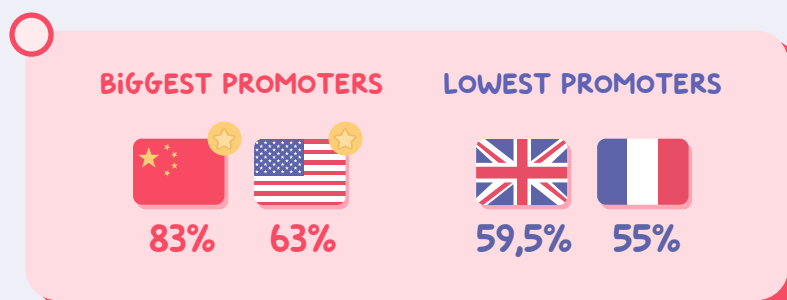
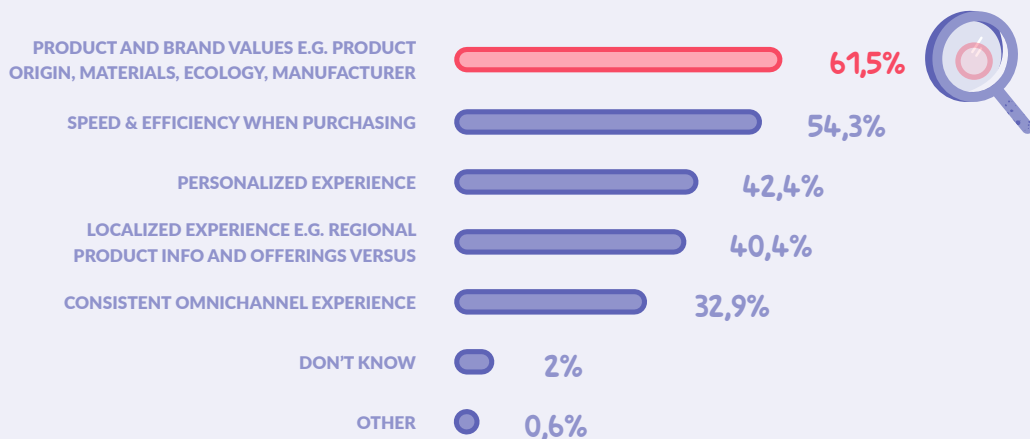
Product Information Management Around the World

While organizations in all four corners of the globe believe in the power and potential of product information, there are some notable differences in how B2B businesses in various geographic areas handle these challenges.

China and US the biggest promoters of product and brand values

Contrary to Chinese (83%) and American buyers (63%), customers in other parts of the world are less fixated on product and brand values (below 60%). **Speed and efficiency** were the top purchase criteria other than price among Canadian respondents, with **roughly 50% citing these factors**. This difference is even starker among French companies, **56% of which cited speed and efficiency as their top criteria**.

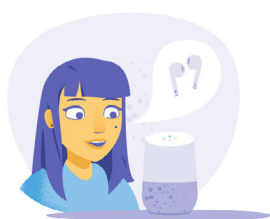
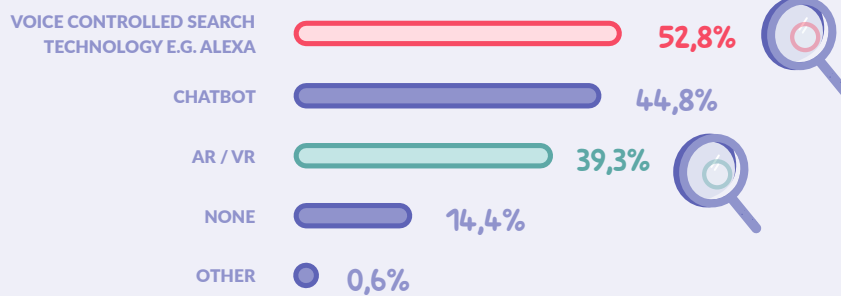
APART FROM THE PRICE, WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE YOUR BUYERS' KEY PURCHASING CRITERIA WHEN MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT BUYING YOUR TYPE OF PRODUCTS/SERVICES?



Chatbot and voice commerce, top future investments

Differences also abound in which technologies respondents believe will become important in the not-so-distant future. For example, in Germany, respondents did not express the high levels of excitement about voice-controlled search that we found in responses from elsewhere in the world. **Voice-controlled tech was cited as the next big thing for 53% of respondents around the world, but just 47% in Germany.** China, meanwhile, has a big appetite for AR (augmented reality) – it was the second most popular technology cited in the region, supplanting chatbots.

DO YOU EXPECT YOUR ORGANIZATION TO IMPLEMENT ANY NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS TO IMPROVE YOUR CUSTOMER BUYING EXPERIENCE?



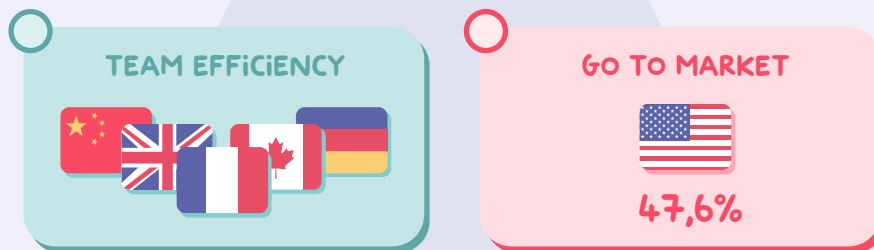
Challenges

Perhaps the starkest difference in product information management processes between various countries was found in the challenges faced by B2B businesses in managing product information. In most countries we surveyed, for instance, team efficiency which involves the collection of product data into a central repository or single system of record was one of the most reported challenges. But, in the United States, the timely launching of new products or services was the most commonly cited challenge.

WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN CHALLENGES WITH MANAGING PRODUCT INFORMATION?



CHALLENGE #1



AKENEO TIP

In the omnichannel age, efficiency and time-to-market are intertwined challenges in any locale. So make sure your team has access to a solution to easily automate manual tasks, foster collaboration, and provide workflows to accelerate your time to market.



CUSTOMER HIGHLIGHT

Boshart saw major increases in revenue after implementing a PIM solution to accelerate time to market. The Canadian construction supplies firm used Akeneo PIM to replace legacy product information tools and Excel spreadsheets, helping them more easily and efficiently get products to market quickly that allowed for more selling days.



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Conclusion & Recommendations

So, what did we learn about the product information practices of B2B business? Simply put, we discovered that **creating a compelling product experience is truly worth it**. Consider that with a better product experience:

- 56% of B2B businesses we surveyed said they could increase sales conversions
- 47% claim they could accelerate cross-sell and upsell activities
- 45% think they could charge more for the same product/service
- 32% envision a decrease in product returns



55%

While survey respondents clearly believe that product information is critical for success, most companies still lack a dedicated solution to manage it.

How can you make sure you don't miss out on all the rewards of building a compelling product experience for B2B buyers? We have five recommendations:

1

Understand your customers' buying journey

B2B buyers are becoming increasingly selective, making purchasing decisions based on a list of criteria and across a growing number of channels. Notably, brand values have become the #1 purchasing criteria after price. Understand what criteria your customers use to evaluate potential purchases so that you can include the relevant product information, and invest in the channels where your customers are buying to extend your market reach.

2

Enrich product information to reinforce your brand values

Increasingly, buyers want to know that the company they are purchasing from shares their values, meaning it's crucial that you broadcast your brand beliefs and show how you put them into action. This includes providing information about the origin of a product, organic materials used in a product, a given manufacturer's social responsibility or carbon footprint, and more.

3**Contextualize product information**

In the omnichannel age, it's crucial that B2B brands contextualize their product information to deliver the right information and experience for each sales channel, conforming to each channel's rules and how buyers interact there. Equally important for cross-border commerce, businesses need to speak their customers' language, but go beyond translation to include adaptation to local customs, metrics, and regulations.

4**Cut costs by optimizing product information management processes and fostering collaboration**

B2B businesses face increased pressure to cut costs while being more agile to keep up with the rapid rate of change in omnichannel commerce. Ensure that you improve your product information management productivity by leveraging automation and efficiency gains with a dedicated product experience management solution. It will allow you to remove tedious, manual tasks and empower your teams to create the compelling experiences that convert prospects into customers.

5**Create new experiences with new technologies**

As interest in new and evolving technologies like voice search, chatbots, AR/VR, and more continues to rise, so does the demand to use these advances to make purchases or learn more about products. However, it's crucial that these new commerce channels do not simply seek to replicate the experience provided by a previous channel, but instead offer a new and compelling experience that uses the specific properties and capabilities of this new technology.

THE SOLUTION FOR DOING ALL THIS?

**A PRODUCT EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT
PLATFORM BACKED BY A ROBUST PIM.**



A PIM solution makes it faster and easier to create and deliver compelling product experiences that are optimized for your customers' buying criteria, and in context for each channel and market where you do business.

A PIM is a winning investment as it supports the key mandates of today's B2B businesses and helps to unlock growth:

- Reduces costs of managing product information and launching new products
- Increases agility: boost ability to adapt your offer to shifting demands
- Accelerates time-to-market: onboard and launch new products faster
- Boosts productivity: increase team collaboration and efficiency including the ability to work with remote and distributed teams

ABOUT THE SURVEY

To learn more about the state of B2B product information in 2020, Akeneo commissioned 3GEM Research to conduct a survey and reached out to 1,600 product information management professionals from seven countries, including Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S. Our respondents came from industries including consumer goods, food and drink, retail, construction, manufacturing, automotive, healthcare, and more, and included C-suite executives, marketing professionals, IT managers, and eCommerce experts.

ABOUT AKENEO

Akeneo is a global leader in Product Experience Management (PXM) solutions that help merchants and brands deliver a compelling customer experience across all sales channels, including eCommerce, mobile, print, and retail points of sale. Akeneo's open-source enterprise PIM, and product data intelligence solutions, dramatically improve product data quality and accuracy while simplifying and accelerating product catalog management.

Leading global brands, including Midland Scientific, Air Liquide, Fossil, Shop.com, and Auchan, trust Akeneo's solutions to scale and customize their omnichannel and cross-border commerce initiatives. Using Akeneo, brands and retailers can improve customer experience, increase sales, reduce time to market, go global, and boost team productivity. For more information, contact hello@akeneo.com.

To go further, get the full results



For additional information, please visit www.akeneo.com.