

PIM – Unlocking Rapid Omnichannel Growth



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Introduction: The Tool that Fuels Omnichannel Growth

The world of commerce is changing – rapidly. B2C commerce has quickly moved from a brick-and-mortar-only business to eCommerce, mobile, and other sales channels, and while B2B companies have not always matched the pace of their consumer-centric counterparts, their transactions are increasingly moving online.

As these changes have made their presence felt, many businesses in a range of industries have shifted their focus to a new strategy – omnichannel commerce. This strategy calls for companies to provide customers with consistent and contextual brand experiences across all channels – from brick-and-mortar stores and print catalogs to modern channels like eCommerce, mobile apps, and social selling. It goes beyond simply enabling customers to communicate with your company via multiple touchpoints. It's about unifying data so that customers find correct, consistent, and high-quality information about the same product on different channels – an experience that leads to better customer experiences and improved sales.

Done correctly, omnichannel commerce makes it possible for your customers to enjoy compelling experiences regardless of how they interact with your company. This provides a competitive advantage because, when customers seamlessly transition between channels without losing context, they can immerse themselves deeper into the brand story, and are more likely to make new purchases and remain loyal customers.

But offering the compelling and complete omnichannel experiences that turn shoppers into customers requires a crucial ingredient – high-quality, accurate, and consistent product information. Whether your customers are consumers or other businesses, they expect to be able to find information on your offerings at the drop of a hat – and if they can't, they'll move on to a new merchant who will offer that information. That's where Product Information Management (PIM) solutions come into play.

As more B2B and B2C companies alike have adopted an omnichannel strategy, PIM has become a foundational pillar for the great customer experience they seek to deliver. In fact, according to Ventana Research, 50% of product-centric organizations will deploy and use PIM solutions to provide high-quality customer experiences by 2021.

Let's take a look at how one company is using PIM to boost conversions and grow their revenue.

A PIM Use Case

Nick, a 36-year old living in Los Angeles, sees a picture of his twin brother wearing a new shirt in his Facebook feed. Nick's brother lives in Paris, and Nick wants to post a photo of himself wearing the same shirt in L.A., so he can make his mom back in New York laugh at her long-distance twins. So, he engages your chatbot via Messenger on his phone to buy a shirt.

The AI-driven chatbot needs to walk Nick through the process of describing the style of the shirt, the color, the size, the price, and the availability from various fulfillment centers. This requires:

- Clear product categorization so that the chatbot can walk Nick precisely down the path of describing what kind of shirt he is looking for.
- Highly organized product matrices that avoid duplicate products like “Long-sleeved sailor shirt” and “Long-Sleeve sailor shirt” or “Blue” and “Indigo” that the chatbot will be unable to realize is actually the same product.
- Accurate and complete localization so that a US Size 10 is recognizable as an EU Size 8, and prices are presented in the right currency.
- Short and conversational descriptions tailored to a chatbot experience.
- The agility to onboard new products in the AI-driven channel quickly and scalable mechanisms to keep existing descriptions up to date.



The reality is that with AI, web services will no longer be managed by people, but by machines. Machines perform best when given highly structured, detailed, and accurate data. And this is the province of product information management.

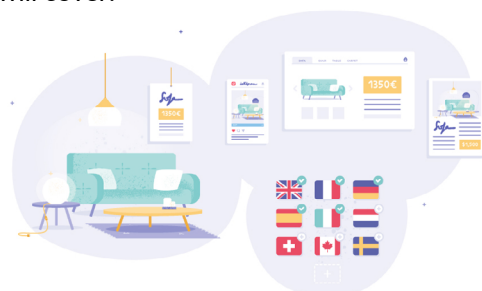
PIM is the enabling underlying technology for everything that's next in eCommerce. PIM can help your organization keep up with, and even get ahead of, these trends.

PIM Powers Omnichannel Commerce

It is vitally important in omnichannel commerce to keep and maintain an accurate, centralized data feed or product catalog that receives and shares product information with disparate inbound and outbound channels such as ERP systems, PLM systems, eCommerce platforms, retail stores, print catalogs, social selling, and marketplaces.

When scaling into new marketing channels, a PIM is the foundational technology critical for success. This whitepaper aims to guide technology and marketing teams through opportunities and potential use cases of a PIM platform to scale- up growth. Here is a summary of what we will cover:

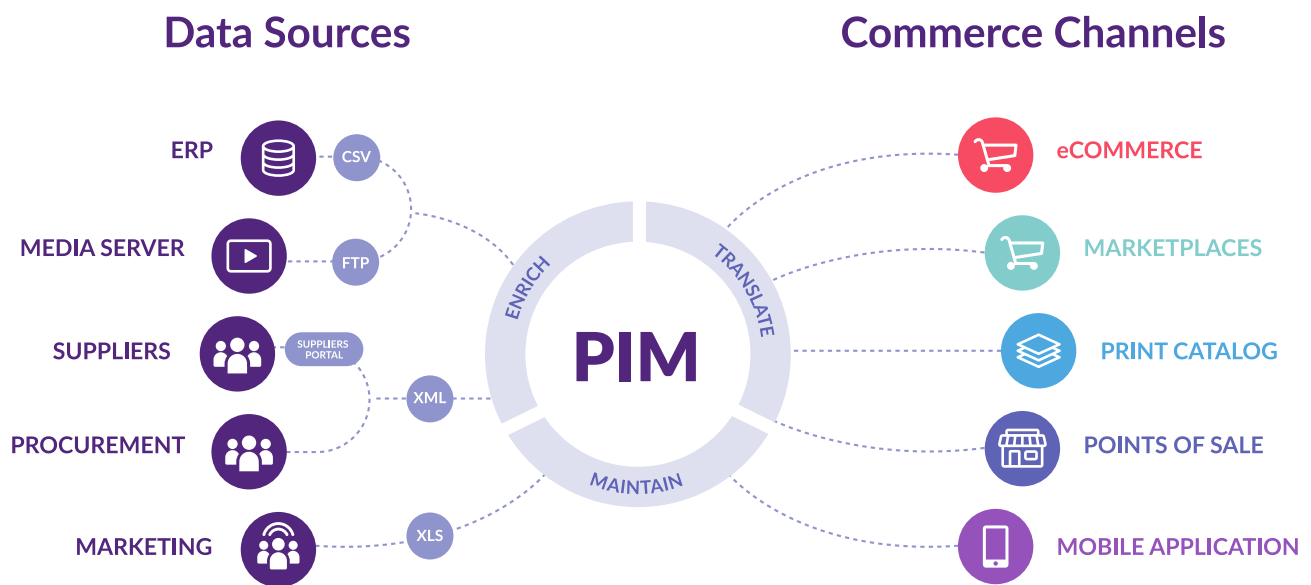
- Your product expansion strategy
- Scaling up your SKU count and product assortment
- Data translation and localization
- The building blocks of omnichannel retail
- Improving conversion rates with a PIM
- Decreasing returns with a PIM



PIM Solutions: The Cornerstone of Successful Operations

A Product Information Management (PIM) solution provides a centralized environment for collecting, managing and distributing product information, which is a combination of marketing and technical information.

PIM systems have rapidly become the cornerstone and hub of successful operations as they enable accurate and quick delivery of product information to disparate sales channels.



Here are the primary functions of PIM solutions:

1. A PIM platform collects product data from a variety of internal and external data sources where raw product data exists - in ERP systems, in files sent from suppliers, and in other systems used by marketing and merchandising teams.
2. Once imported, raw product data in the PIM can then be standardized, categorized, enriched (including with images and other digital assets), and put into context for different channels, as well as localized and translated for different markets.
3. The finished product information can be distributed to multiple channels including websites, eCommerce platforms, marketplace listings, print catalogs, points-of-sale, mobile applications, and voice assistants.

When Do You Need a PIM?

As a business grows and the number of channels it operates in expands, deploying a PIM solution at the right time is critical to not only unlocking new revenue streams, but also preventing lost sales. Here are critical signs that indicate the need for a PIM solution:

Complex product information sets

If your product information set is complex, with thousands of products and/or attributes that require significant time to manage, organize, and enrich, you can benefit from a PIM solution.

Complex internal organization

If your product information is poorly organized or managed, a PIM solution can help your team collaborate and reduce the number of steps needed to take a product online.

Slow market launches

If the current product launch system to a merchant's website and other channels is slowing down the ability to get products to market on time for seasonal buying periods, a PIM that offers a robust product launch process flow should be put in place.

Global expansion and localization

Businesses about to expand retail or wholesale operations into new international markets, or businesses already selling globally, and who struggle to manage multiple languages and market-specific products, will benefit from a PIM solution that can manage and deploy catalogs by channel and locale.

Customer complaints due to limited or inaccurate product information

If product information across your catalog is inaccurate, incomplete, or of low quality due to poor product update processes, customer experience will be negatively affected. This can result in high return rates and customer complaints. Providing high-quality product information can be achieved by deploying a PIM solution.

Inconsistent product information across channels

If your product information is inconsistent across channels, a PIM solution can be used to create consistency, and allow for product information to be put into context for customers in each channel.

Varying compliance and governance processes

If the regulations in the countries you operate in require country-specific compliance in product copy, a PIM can help govern the data to ensure compliance.

Replatforming

If your company is updating, changing, or adding a new eCommerce platform, a PIM can be used to ensure your new platform is launched with the most up to date and consistent product data so your eCommerce site is populated with the best possible information.

 A PIM serves as a single source of accurate product information.

Who uses PIM Solutions?

The day-to-day management of a PIM is typically handled by a small group of product information management personnel. That being said, depending on how big or complex the value chain of your organization is, several dozen users could be added as contributors to the PIM.

You will find that most deployments of PIM systems cater to almost every department in an organization, making it useful across the entire value chain. PIM solution users can be found in all departments involved in making or selling a product, such as:

Marketing, catalog managers, and merchandising teams

These teams upload product information designed to help their customers know more about the products and make informed choices. Uploaded product information will typically be a combination of uses and applications of the product, emotional and compelling product descriptions, and digital assets such as product photos and videos.

Studio teams

Creative professionals who manage all digital assets - videos, images - and upload those digital assets to the PIM so they can be associated with product pages that are distributed to your sales channels.

Translation teams

Polyglots responsible for translating product information into local languages for cross-border commerce or in-country websites and print catalogs may log directly into the PIM and post translated product information. Sometimes, these translation teams may be third-parties, so your PIM needs to be able to closely manage user rights and permissions.

R&D or design departments

These teams use PIMs to add technical information and technical documentation such as CAD/CAM drawings and technical manuals that were generated over the course of product development.

Procurement departments

Procurement professionals often access PIMs in order to upload technical product information and reference information about suppliers and manufacturers.

Customer experience teams

These critically important omnichannel operatives typically upload frequently asked questions related to products and may also amend customer-facing product information based on customer feedback.

Suppliers

Manufacturers and distributors work with and access a PIM in order to add technical product information, product identifiers, and factual product description information, as well as descriptive information about their brands which could be used as reference data on a product page.



Make Way for Growth: Scaling Operations with PIM

A major business benefit of PIM is its ability to help businesses efficiently scale their omnichannel operations, as well as to rapidly expand into international markets.

One way to increase revenue growth is to sell more products and therefore expand your product assortment.

For the best possible product experience, product information needs to be made accurate and consistent, then enriched to include technical specifications, usage information, customized descriptions, and digital media like images and video. Your marketing team also need to create emotion and trust that will resonate with customers and positively influence their purchase decisions. This product information will then need to be translated and localized for each region as required. Finally, the resulting product catalog will be exported and optimized for each specific distribution channel like your eCommerce platform, multi-vendor marketplaces, print, etc.

“*Before PIM, we only updated our products on the website 4 times a year. Now, we can do it on a daily basis.*”

– **Patrick Dijkhof**, *Online Engagement Consultant at Deventrade*

Like many labor-intensive processes, the efficiencies required to maintain high-quality product information can be significantly improved with automation and workflow features. The elimination of repetitive tasks by automating as many sub-processes as possible, as well as an ability to better govern and track process steps, will help your content and marketing teams focus on putting together high-quality product information.

General-purpose tools such as spreadsheets and internal databases, however, do not tend to have the capacity to scale to keep up with multichannel and international eCommerce demands. What’s more, teams that rely on their IT teams for ERP exports often struggle with efficiency and productivity.

As a result, for teams that still rely on rudimentary tools such as spreadsheets to keep track of product information, any channel or regional expansion plan will very likely suffer through product information quality and/or staffing issues.

“*Still, 94% of organizations use spreadsheets to support product information, according to a study from Ventana Research, while a study from Buyer Zone found that more than 90% of companies with more than 11 employees use a CRM system. We don’t use Excel for customer data management anymore - and there’s no reason to use it for product data management, either!*”

To illustrate the scaling that PIM can help address, let's take a look at an apparel and footwear brand with 30,000 SKUs selling in 3 distinct countries/languages through a single website.

At the start of this scenario, the marketing team is already quite busy managing 6,300,000 distinct data points (# of SKUs x Attributes per SKU x Number of localizations x Number of channels.) The company plans to add more products, product data, and specifications to each of its SKUs. A relatively common expansion plan calls for annually adding:

- 10,000 new SKUs, with a corresponding average increase in attributes per SKU
- 1 new region, and
- 1 new distribution channel.

Apparel Brand Expansion	Year 1	Year 1	Year 3
Number of SKUs	30,000	40,000	50,000
Attributes per SKU	70	80	90
Number of languages (localizations)	3	4	5
Number of channels (e.g. website, print catalogs, mobile app)	1	2	3
Number of data points to handle	6,300,000	25,600,000	67,500,000

Without a PIM, this “modest” plan would quickly run their marketing team into the ground by expanding their duties to cover 67.5 million data points —a greater than 10-fold increase! But, with a PIM at the heart of the channel and international expansion plan, this apparel business is able to expand its offering more efficiently. Scaling operations across multiple channels and globally without a PIM in place, meanwhile, will have given rise to a number of complications and increased the potential for mistakes.

The PIM they had in place removed the need to exponentially grow their marketing operations staff; they instead achieved scale through automation, structured data, and highly efficient workflows.

Translation and Localization Made Easy

What is Localization?

Localization involves translating and adapting entire shopping experiences for a target audience with regional and cultural sensitivity in mind.

There are plenty of oversimplified assumptions about what localization entails, with the most popular defining localization as simply language translation of product descriptions. But localization is more than just product description translations – it involves adapting the entire shopping experience within a local market.

The following aspects of a shopping experience will need equal attention to product descriptions:

- Customer profile information
- Database driven content
- Sizing conversions
- Currency conversions
- International payments
- SEO / domains
- Shipping information
- Legal information



PIM and Localization

As you expand into new markets, it is critical to ensure that all information related to products in your catalog, as well as multimedia elements, are translated accurately, localized as appropriate, and generally feel customized to that specific market. Otherwise, you'll struggle both to close sales and deal with ballooning returns from unhappy customers.

☛ Localization seems straightforward, but the execution can get messy and complicated.

A PIM solution sits at the center of a product catalog and acts as a **single source of truth for all product information**. This allows product information to be efficiently translated, localized, and pushed out automatically for each location and platform. More specifically, PIM solutions enhance translation and localization in the following ways:

Integration of inside/outside tools and contributors

New and updated products can be identified from ERPs and supplier systems and put into the localization queue. A good PIM system will integrate with 3rd-party translation tools and agencies like Translations.com and Textmaster to make it easy to manage the translation process and facilitate loading the translated product information into the PIM.

Simplification of processes

Simplifying your processes helps localization teams by showing only the specific fields that need to be changed for any given localization. These teams can be internal or external to your organization.



Global workflows

These productivity tools help distributed teams seamlessly work together with easy-to-use workflows that can be customized for each specific product category and region. Every team member will be able to view their tasks sequentially within the PIM. A capable PIM solution will also provide progress reports, completeness status, and quality feedback for each task.



Automation of export

A business rules engine and automation features assure that, as soon as localization changes are made and approved, the final localized product information populates the appropriate eCommerce platforms, marketplace listings, print catalogs, and/or other channels and storefronts.

Take Omnichannel from Buzzword to Reality

Your Omnichannel Strategy

Omnichannel commerce is a multichannel approach to selling that focuses on delivering a seamless shopping experience regardless of the channel shoppers engage with. In an effective omnichannel deployment, shoppers are unable to distinguish their shopping experience across various channels – be it via desktop, mobile devices, over the phone, or in a brick-and-mortar store. Their customer details, access to product inventory, and other tactile aspects of their shopping experience essentially remain the same.

An omnichannel approach ensures integration between distribution, promotion, and communication channels on the back end. So if, for example, a customer was interacting with a customer service representative on webchat, the representative would be able to immediately reference that customer's purchase history or favorites from their web shopping session. That customer could then continue with their shopping session on any device later with a smartphone, tablet, or by phone.

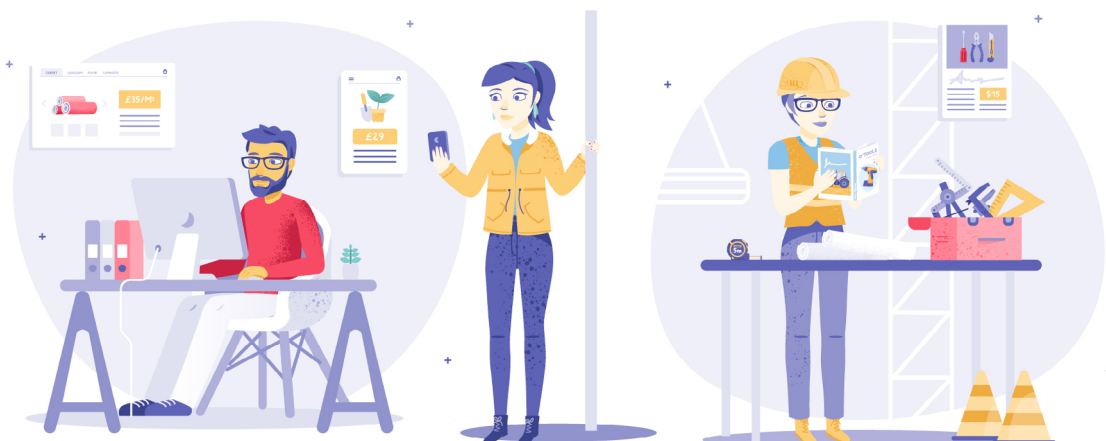
How a PIM Solution Enables An Omnichannel Strategy

One key feature of a PIM platform is its ability to help your team put product assets, data, and information into the proper context.

This is crucial for success in an omnichannel age, because while customer experience is critical to success, there is **no one experience to rule them all**. Each and every channel your business sells on has its own rules, requirements, strengths, and weaknesses. If your business doesn't tailor and adapt product information to fit these unique properties, it won't matter how many channels you sell on – none of them will resonate with customers or lead to commercial success.

PIM, however, serves as a foundational technology that can help your business by providing the infrastructure your company needs to present product information in the proper context for each channel you sell on. It does so by centralizing and harmonizing all the technical, usage, and emotional information for your product listings and catalogs, ensuring that you provide shoppers with data that is accurate, consistent, and **contextual**.

A robust PIM solution will also offer a healthy and vibrant community of connectors and integrations. These companion solutions can help facilitate the exchange of information between the PIM and each of your sales channels, helping you reduce errors in product information and boost conversions.



Decrease Inaccuracy, Increase Conversion Rates

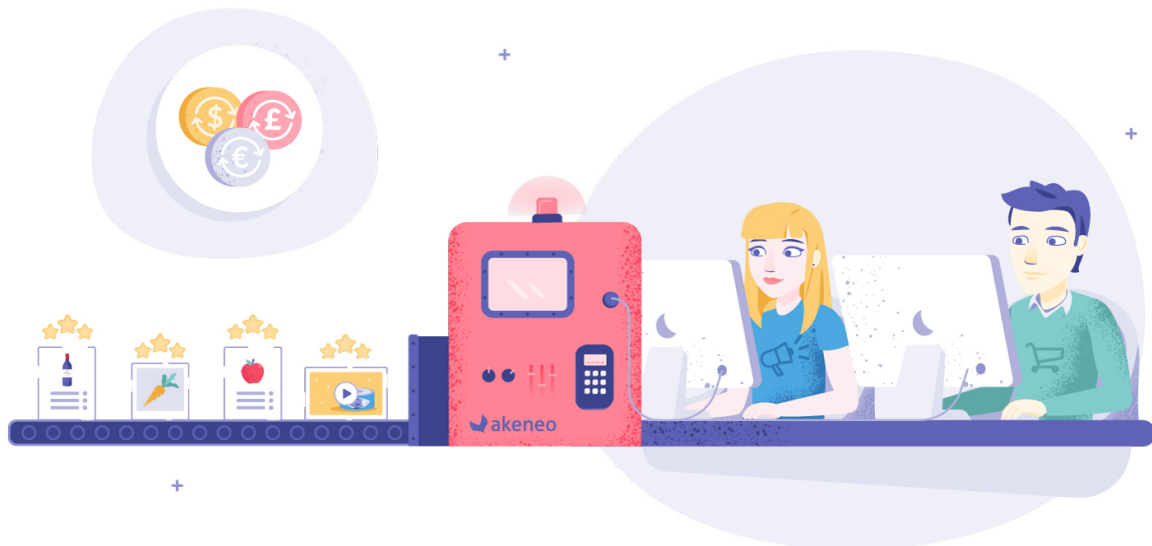
Our tests and customer data show that more detailed and accurate product information leads to higher conversions and increased revenue. PIM systems facilitate the upload of channel-specific content content, resulting in more conversions in the range of a 20-50% increase.

How does this happen?

The efficiency gains of staff members created by a PIM workflow automation are channeled into creating improved product content – which in turn leads to increased conversions and reduced returns.

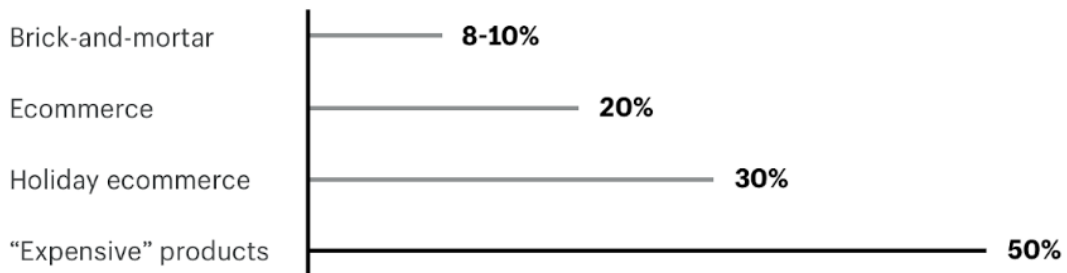
Just picture a pair of websites – one stocked with low-quality, inaccurate product assets, while the other is comprised of compelling product descriptions, dynamic product assets, and accurate, consistent, and complete product data. The first website will fail to catch the attention of consumers, properly inform them about the product they're considering purchasing, and ultimately leave them looking for a better experience from a different seller. The website with high-quality, consistent, and accurate product descriptions and images, meanwhile, converts at much higher—which in turn allows for more resource allocation to the PIM, creating a virtuous cycle of product information enrichment and revenue growth.

What would be the impact of higher-quality product assets and information on your business? Look at your current eCommerce revenue, and imagine what it would look like if you saw a 20% increase – chances are your CEO would be very happy!



A Solution to Rising Return Rates

Return rates in retail and ecommerce



Data via eMarketer (2018), Star Business Journal (2017), and Forrester via The WSJ (2015)

With about **20% of eCommerce sales** being sent back to sellers, returns are a big problem for many eCommerce businesses. What's more, many retailers **say** that they are seeing a real rise in the number of product returns, particularly among digital shoppers, with returns costing sellers more than \$600 billion around the world each year.

Many returns are unavoidable. They can simply be chalked up to buyer behavior, including customers who buy expensive items to use them once before returning them, and those that buy several products at once so they can see what color or size works best for them, returning the rest.

But according to many analysts, the vast majority of returns – nearly two-thirds, in fact – are the result of mistakes made by retailers. If customers do not receive what they thought they bought, they will end up returning it, which leads to a loss of immediate and potential future sales.

A PIM platform, however, uses features like automated enrichment rules, product completeness, validation, and more to help reduce the volume of returns your business faces. It highlights incomplete product information, and uses validation workflow to ensure the continuous delivery of complete and accurate product information. As a result, when data errors and incomplete product information are removed by a PIM, customer return rates plummet.

The deployment of localization through a PIM, meanwhile, helps ensure shoppers are greeted with fully translated product descriptions in their local language and their local unit of measurement. Verticals with traditionally very high return rates like fashion, apparel, and consumer electronics often **see a drop in return rates of 40% or more after the adoption of PIM.**



Get to Customers Quickly: Decrease Time-to-Market

PIM solutions help organizations streamline their product creation and enrichment processes to bring new products and seasonal collections to market much faster compared to spreadsheets or other ill-suited tools. This helps them win the race to market, even over the biggest players in their space.

Our customer data shows that organizations utilizing PIM are able to bring new product assortments to both their domestic and international markets up to four times faster than prior to the deployment of PIM.

The impact of the speed-to-market achieved through cumulative efficiency and workflow gains allows for more time to sell products before competitors and marketplaces have a chance to dominate search results.

Verticals with very sensitive time-to-market like fashion, apparel, and consumer electronics can significantly speed up their product launches with the adoption of a PIM solution.

Customer Story: MYER

With over 60 stores spread across Australia, Myer is Australia's oldest and largest department store. The company offers a range of products, including clothing and apparel, toys, homeware, entertainment and consumer electronics from a varied base of suppliers.

Myer's reputation in Australia has been built on its massive selection offering, which has also presented a product information organization challenge. Many of the company's suppliers did not adhere to image style guidelines or product information structure. As a result, Myer was often faced with incorrect, inconsistent, and low-quality information in its eCommerce store. Myer also had product information management issues with its legacy spreadsheet file-sharing system.

After considering several product information solutions, Myer decided to go with Akeneo PIM, primarily due to Akeneo's open-source and API offerings that didn't force them to start product customization from scratch.

Myer was able to guide its suppliers on how to use Akeneo's PIM to enrich their own product information. They also instituted a new product information grading and scoring system that gave suppliers more transparency into critical assets required to launch products to stores, eCommerce site, and their mobile app.



★ Key wins:

- This deployment enabled Myer improve their time-to-market, cutting the average enrichment time from over 28 days to under a week.
- The automation features of Akeneo PIM has helped Myer cut average product information enrichment time per product from 20 minutes to under 3 minutes.
- About 60 percent of all products are now added and enriched by suppliers, in comparison to just 30 percent before the deployment of Akeneo PIM.

PIM: Powering What's Next

It is an extremely exciting period we live in, with many revolutionary technologies bringing customers closer together and giving shoppers direct access to seek out more information when making purchasing decisions.

This provides an opportunity for retailers and brands to deliver product information to customers more openly, efficiently and rapidly with a PIM.

The hidden power of a PIM lies in its structured data format, which makes the data it churns out compatible with cutting edge technologies that will increasingly power the new ways we shop. Technologies like AI, augmented or virtual shopping experiences, automated chatbots and voice-enabled shopping mandate structured data in order to deliver the right shopping experiences. All of these technologies require a significant amount of product information plumbing in order to work.

A highly organized and structured product catalog is mandatory to take advantage of new technologies and unlock the power of omnichannel commerce.



Take the Next Step: About Akeneo and BigCommerce



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 Sephora, 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.

Akeneo is based in France, Germany, and the United States. For more information about our solutions: www.akeneo.com.



About BigCommerce

BigCommerce is the world's leading cloud eCommerce platform for established and rapidly-growing businesses. Combining enterprise functionality, an open architecture and app ecosystem, and market-leading performance, BigCommerce enables businesses to grow online sales with 80% less cost, time and complexity than on-premise software. BigCommerce powers B2B and B2C eCommerce for industry-leading brands, including Assurant, Ben & Jerry's, Paul Mitchell, Sony and Toyota.

Find out how Akeneo and BigCommerce can help your brand reach new heights.

[Learn more](#)



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