



The Comprehensive **PIM** Buyers' Guide for 2026



What You Need to Know Before You Choose a PIM



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

This guide explains Product Information Management (PIM) in plain language. It shows why PIM matters in 2026, how it supports growth, and how to choose the right platform. You will learn about features, questions to ask vendors, how PIM fits with your other systems, and how to build a strong business case. We keep the sentences short and the jargon light, so a non-expert can follow with ease.

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

Senior leaders, product and eCommerce teams, IT, and data managers — anyone who wants product data to work harder across channels.

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Introduction

The Product Data Picture in 2026

Online shoppers do not pick up products. They read about them. Specs, images, and attributes do the selling. If your product information is messy or out of date, sales suffer. So does trust and compliance.

Customers shop everywhere: marketplaces, direct-to-consumer sites, distributors, social feeds, and in-store apps. The content bar is higher.

Your rivals are one click away. Strong product data is no longer a hygiene factor. It is a direct lever for growth.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is now part of daily work. It speeds up enrichment, translation, governance, and insight. The best teams treat PIM as a strategic platform — the central nervous system for product data. These teams launch faster, rank better, and fix issues sooner.

A modern PIM is not just a central place to store data. It is a smart hub that brings people, process, and technology together to deliver consistent, channel-ready content at scale.

What Industry Analysts See: Trends Shaping 2026 and Beyond



AI BY DEFAULT

Generative AI and machine learning are becoming standard in today's PIM offering. They can perform tasks like:

- Inferring missing product attributes
- Flagging anomalies and inconsistencies
- Translating content
- Writing high-quality channel-specific copy

Having said that, controls and approvals matter just as much as the actual output.

PIM TO PXM

Buyers expect a wider product experience. PIM is designed to support governed data management, rich digital assets (imagery, documentation), and the analytics feedback from your digital shelf which drives continuous improvement.

DIGITAL SHELF FEEDBACK LOOPS

Internal teams can track content health, availability, price consistency, and any moves by competitors. These findings provide the insight you need to set enrichment priorities and close the loop.

RULES AND STANDARDS

There's an ever-increasing demand for sustainability credentials, safety data, and barcode changes (including 2D barcodes). This trend intensifies the need for clear data lineage and provable claims. It's no more or less than regulators, marketplaces and customers expect.

COMPOSABLE STACKS

Like Lego blocks, you can build your stack piece by piece. And you can integrate everything by using API-first platforms and event streams so that your data flows around the business like a healthy athlete's bloodstream. With PIM as a modular, centralised hub, alongside clean integration with other systems, and a strong data governance framework, you possess the blueprint for success.

DATA QUALITY AS INSURANCE COVER FOR REVENUE

By deploying data quality scorecards for completeness, accuracy, and freshness, you can establish KPIs as far up as board-level.

What a PIM is in 2026



A PIM is the central platform for your product data. It ingests, structures, enriches, governs and publishes accurate information to every customer touchpoint. In 2026 the value of a PIM is not only the single source of truth. It is the ability to create consistent, channel ready content at speed while giving teams full control and visibility.

A strong PIM supports growth by improving data quality, reducing manual effort and making every product launch faster and more reliable.

HOW PIM HAS EVOLVED

A modern PIM has changed significantly. It now:

- Acts as an intelligent source of growth rather than a simple storage system
- Uses AI to accelerate enrichment, localisation and quality checks
- Integrates more tightly with ERP, DAM, commerce and analytics tools
- Strengthens governance with workflows, audit trails and clear ownership
- Supports product experience management that improves search, discovery and conversion

These changes make PIM a strategic platform rather than a back office tool.

WHAT PIM IS *NOT*

A PIM is not a magic switch. It will not clean your data, fix broken processes or replace the need for governance. Product information still needs clear standards, consistent workflows and defined ownership.

A PIM performs best when people, processes and data are already aligned. The platform amplifies good practices and exposes gaps, which is why preparation matters. When implemented well, it becomes the engine of trusted, high performing product content.

Why You Need a PIM in 2026



Here's the low-down on the compelling reasons for PIM investment in 2026.

Pain points without PIM

Perennial problems exist nowadays if a business is relying on old-school product data management practices:

- Fragmented spreadsheets and legacy systems cause inconsistent content. Consequently, SEO efficiency and fundamental trust in your brand both suffer.
- Slow onboarding of supplier data, making it hard to scale in line with your desire to expand.
- There are perpetual bottlenecks in the launch process for new products, channels, or regions.
- The risk of non-compliance rises considerably when multiple versions of copy are scattered across the organisation, with no apparent control.

How AI optimises performance

Modern PIMs use AI-powered features for a wide range of value adders, including:

- Proposing missing attributes
- Spotting anomalies
- Generating or optimising channel-specific copy
- Translating copy at scale
- Benchmarking your digital shelf against competitors'

What's more, these features (and more) can be kept on a leash - with the right guardrails, AI enables you to manage product data so it gives you a significant competitive edge in a brutally competitive operating environment.

Power and perfection with PIM

- **Speed.** You can onboard thousands of SKUs fast, reduce time to market and open new channels sooner.
- **Quality.** If you're using governed, complete, channel-ready content, it cuts returns and complaints drastically.
- **Efficiency.** Imagine how much time automation saves, freeing your teams from the drudge (and error-prone nature) of manual copy-and-paste work.
- **Discoverability.** Using structured attributes, better titles and rich media, PIM boosts search volumes and conversion rate.
- **Resilience.** Operational risk is significantly lower with audits, approvals, and version history in place. Customisation: Tailor the PIM to your business needs. For instance, if you're a B2B manufacturer, you might prioritise certain data fields over others.

The types of product data a PIM manages

Of the many product data types a PIM handles, here are the most common:

- Core identifiers: SKUs, GTIN/UPC/EAN, brand, model, taxonomy, relationships.
- Technical: dimensions, materials, specs, ingredients, certifications, warranties.
- Commercial: pack sizes, assortments, bundles, cross-sells and up-sells.
- Channel mappings: category trees, attribute rules, marketplace-compliant templates.
- Marketing: titles, bullets, long descriptions, keywords, personas, SEO metadata.
- Digital assets: images, 360/Augmented Reality (AR), video, manuals, data sheets, safety, and other compliance documentation.
- Localisation: translations and cultural edits; regional compliance.
- Governance: version history, access and change approval, data lineage, and audit trails.

How internal teams benefit from PIM

It's a win-win for all when you remove duplicate and incomplete data:

- Product and category managers: they get faster launches, reliable master data, and variant control without SKU spreadsheet sprawl.
- eCommerce and merchandising: they can push stronger discovery and better conversion by generating consistent, channel-specific content.
- Marketing: They can produce brand-consistent copy at scale with AI support, meaning less need for manual firefighting and more time for targeted and strategic initiatives.
- Sales and customer support: They act safe in the knowledge that the information they're using is current and correct everywhere.
- Data and IT: Integration is scalable, and fine-grained access control can be applied to personnel. Ultimately, it all means a lower technical overhead.

10 Key Questions to Ask Before You Select a PIM



You may understandably have concerns around how to go about selecting a PIM solution which fits your needs. Below are some highly pertinent questions to ask vendors during this phase. Of course, one size doesn't fit all, but we've provided examples of the kinds of responses to resonate with you as to whether the vendor is giving you the full picture.

1. What outcomes are we buying?

Actually, this is for you to answer. Clearly define your metrics for success in terms of revenue, cost, risk, and customer experience to name four.

You need to balance flexibility, security, cost, and capacity. SaaS has become the most common (and easily scalable) model for scale and lower Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) – in fact, you don't own it, which is a good thing when it comes to costs! Check with vendors about service packages and SLAs.

2. Cloud-native, hybrid or on-premises?

3. How can we integrate the PIM with our current stack?

Check that the vendor offers API-driven connectivity to ERP, DAM, eCommerce, OMS, CRM/CDP, analytics, data lakes, and marketplaces. Enquire about modular PIMs.

You're looking for native features vs plug-ins, roadmap, governance and measured (and measurable) gains.

4. What is the vendor's take regarding AI?

5. How does supplier onboarding work?

Enquire further about templates, validation, mappings, and supplier self-service portals.

You want support for hierarchies, variants, bundles, and multi-domain master data so check that is incorporated.

6. How strong is the data model?

7. What about workflows and governance?

Dig down into areas like role-based access, approvals, SLAs, how easy it is to systematically audit and how to implement data quality scoring.

Nowadays, common features include pre-built connectors, custom exports, channel presets, and monitoring. Check these at minimum.

8. How robust is syndication?

9. How does it support localisation?

At minimum, localisation features should include translation memory, AI-powered assistance, and features to ensure regional compliance.

You don't want to be ambushed by hidden costs. Delve into licences, implementation costs, any changes, tech updates, operational improvements, and a realistic figure for time-to-value.

10. What is the total cost-to-value?

PIM Features and Capabilities That Make a Difference in 2026 and Beyond



Baseline features

These are the essentials. Any credible PIM should deliver them.

- **Strong data model and governance** with attributes, hierarchies, relationships and version history.
- **Workflows and collaboration** that support assignments, approvals, SLAs and audit trails.
- **Supplier onboarding** tools for bulk import, validation, mapping and basic collaboration.
- **Digital asset management** for metadata, transformations and linking assets to SKUs.
- **Syndication** basics including templates, exports and monitoring for channel issues.
- **APIs** and extensibility for connecting your PIM to other systems without heavy custom development.

These capabilities form the foundation. If a platform cannot do these well, it will struggle to scale with you.

Differentiators

These are the capabilities that separate good PIMs from great PIMs.

- **AI assisted enrichment** that suggests attributes, detects anomalies and fills data gaps.
- **AI generated** content for titles, descriptions and channel specific copy with guardrails in place.
- **Automated translation and localisation** that support fast multi market launches.
- **Digital shelf analytics** to monitor content quality, SEO performance and competitor activity.
- Low code automation so business teams can build rules and workflows without developer support.
- **Composable and headless** options for creating flexible front end experiences using consistent product content.
- **High performance at scale** including large catalogues, concurrent users and near real time updates.
- **Security and compliance** through SSO, role based access, audit logs, data residency and relevant certifications.

These differentiators have the biggest impact on efficiency, speed, customer experience and long term value.

Comparing Top PIM Vendors in 2026



These short profiles are neutral and practical. Match them to your use cases, scale, and operating model. Validate details with the vendors.



Akeneo (Akeneo Product Cloud)

- **Focus:** mid-market to enterprise retailers, brands and manufacturers in many regions and channels.
- **Composable:** API-first with marketplace apps and modular services (PIM, PXM, activation/analytics).
- **APIs and integrations:** REST/GraphQL, webhooks and a large connector ecosystem.
- **DAM:** native Akeneo Asset Manager and external DAM integrations.
- **Cloud:** SaaS.
- **Standout:** strong governance and collaboration, scalable data model for variants/bundles, supplier data manager, embedded AI for enrichment and optimisation, activation with monitoring.
- **Notes:** define ownership and workflows early; align data model and governance.



Bluemeteor (Product Content Cloud)

- **Focus:** manufacturers and distributors with complex catalogues and industry taxonomies (for example ETIM or UNSPSC) and multi-partner ecosystems.
- **Composable:** components like DataBridge (a tool to integrate and connect systems with each other) as well as supplier portals. Both can fit into existing stacks.
- **Integrations:** advanced data mapping for onboarding; API connectors for syndication and portals (suppliers and channels).
- **DAM:** product content and digital assets in one platform, with external DAM options.
- **Cloud-native:** SaaS.
- **Standouts:** supplier onboarding at scale, product taxonomy/classification mapping, low-code rules, in-context content optimisation, AI-assisted quality controls.



Bluestone PIM

- **Focus:** B2C and B2B organisations wanting quick time-to-value and ease of usability.
- **Composable:** multi-tenant SaaS with an extension hub/marketplace for further tools/apps.
- **APIs and integrations:** extensive API surface, event-based actions, apps for commerce/CMS/syndication and low-code automations.
- **DAM:** native asset handling with links to SKUs; external DAMs supported.
- **Cloud-native:** SaaS.
- **Standouts:** AI for copy, attributes, translation, and data quality; predefined models; business-friendly UX.



Inriver

- **Focus:** brands, manufacturers and retailers that use product information to drive revenue across multiple channels.
- **Composable:** cloud-based platform for managing and distributing product information.
- **APIs and integrations:** REST API; supports integrations with commerce, ERP and downstream systems; includes syndication capabilities and Digital Shelf Analytics.
- **DAM:** manages product-related digital assets directly within the platform.
- **Cloud:** SaaS
- **Standouts:** adaptable data model, tools for enrichment and collaboration, omnichannel syndication, and Digital Shelf Analytics to monitor product performance.



Plytix

- **Focus:** SME and mid-market teams who value accessibility, collaboration, and fast onboarding for common channels.
- **Composable:** SaaS with simple APIs, brand portals, and export tools; pairs with feed/marketplace tools as needed.
- **Integrations:** native connectors for major platforms; exports to common templates; public API (a connector made available to external developers to allow them to integrate with you).
- **DAM:** built-in with transformations and brand portals.
- **Cloud-native:** SaaS.
- **Standout:** straightforward pricing tiers, quick implementation, often unlimited users, collaborative workflows, and accessible AI assistance.



Sales Layer


- **Focus:** mid-market manufacturers, brands and retailers that want quick time-to-value, strong connectors and catalogue sharing with partners.
- **Composable:** SaaS with pre-built connectors and instant digital catalogues; integrates with wider stacks.
- **Integrations:** connectors with major marketplaces and/or platforms like Shopify, BigCommerce, Amazon, CSV/Excel templates, and API; transformation engine - a system feature that automatically and dynamically converts digital assets, such as images and videos, into the various formats and renditions required for different channels and uses.
- **DAM:** advanced features on higher pricing tiers.
- **Cloud-native:** SaaS.
- **Standouts:** quality scoring, workflows and role-based controls, instant catalogues/portals, multilingual engine, and AI tools on premium tiers.



Salsify

- **Focus:** global brands, manufacturers and retailers managing product experiences across digital channels, marketplaces and retailers.
- **Composable:** unified cloud suite combining PIM, DAM, activation, workflow, GDSN and analytics.
- **APIs and integrations:** API-first approach; supports thousands of retailer and marketplace endpoints; connectors for ecommerce platforms; GDSN integration.
- **DAM:** enterprise DAM with asset storage, transformations and linkage to product content.
- **Cloud-native:** SaaS.
- **Standouts:** broad retail/marketplace syndication network, readiness scoring, workflow capabilities, multilingual support and digital shelf analytics.

Building Your Business Case (and Getting Sign-Off)



Your executive board wants outcomes, whether through software or not. ROI rules, so be sure to anchor your business case in a solid block of revenue, cost, and risk. With modern PIM solutions, you can also show how AI brings time-to-value forward.

What generates more revenue?

- **Higher conversion rate** from richer, more accurate content and better discoverability.
- **Faster time-to-market** for events like seasonal launches, marketplace expansion and entering new regions.
- **Wider assortment** as you onboard more SKUs and variants without forcing your people to drown in a sea of manual data rework.

What are the cost levers?

- Less **manual data wrangling** and far fewer duplicated tasks across teams.
- Scaled **content production**: AI-assisted copy, translation, and attribute completion.
- Lower **returns** and burden on customer support because you're using accurate specs which are compatible across channels.

Smart tip: With vendor demos include a small real-life dataset in your RFP. Ask the vendor to run it end-to-end, from rough supplier data to channel-ready content, including AI enrichment and quality assurance.

What are the risk factors?

- **Compliance:** controlled access, approvals protocols and auditable changes.
- **Brand governance:** consistent tone, imagery and claims across channels and countries.
- **Operational resilience:** fewer single-point spreadsheets; transparent, traceable data lineage.

How to quantify the gains

- **What's the baseline as-is?** Time to onboard and publish; error rates; reasons for return; content-related tickets.
- **Set feasible targets:** For example, 50% faster onboarding, 30% fewer content errors, 10% conversion lift for optimised product categories.
- **Money value:** Transform targets achieved (like the above) into money; Don't forget to include risks avoided and opportunity costs accrued due to time spent (lost?) on manual rework.
- **Time-to-value:** outline the first 90–180 days. Show where AI can accelerate gains I (and thus, increase competitive strength).

Your PIM Selection Playbook



1. Discovery and strategy

Clarify goals, future channels, and success measures. Audit product data, sources, quality, taxonomy and governance. Identify constraints in ERP, eCommerce, DAM and supplier data flows.

Define outcomes that matter most: data enrichment speed, accuracy, governance, syndication, multi-region growth or reducing manual effort. Map future-state workflows and identify where automation and rules will have the biggest impact.

2. Prioritised use cases

Create a clear requirements set covering data model flexibility, governance, integrations, user experience and TCO. Build a weighted scorecard. Share sample data so vendors can demonstrate how your real-world flows will run.

3. Shortlist and RFP

Run scenario-based demos using your data. Evaluate performance, UI, enrichment automation, workflow fit and API maturity. Assess vendor roadmap, support model and long-term viability.

4. Proof of value

5. Implementation

Validate implementation approach, roles and responsibilities. Define your data readiness plan, governance model and integration flows. Support contract alignment and prepare teams for onboarding.

Add channels, regions and suppliers. Refine rules and workflows as your catalogue grows. Connect to analytics and AI systems for stronger product experiences.

6. Scale and optimise

FAQs:

The Questions Buyers Actually Ask



Is a PIM solution a replacement for our ERP?

Not at all. Your ERP holds operational and financial data, whereas PIM specialises in product content and experience. Definitely integrate the two, but don't conflate their uses.

Where should the product lifecycle start? ERP or PIM?

It all depends. Many merchants start the commercial lifecycle in PIM to speed enrichment and channel readiness. ERP remains the source for pricing and inventory.

What if our data is a mess?

Most businesses begin their PIM journey with messy data. Inconsistent attributes, missing specs and scattered assets are completely normal, but they must be fixed before you go live.

A PIM will not clean or standardise your data for you. The groundwork still needs to happen.

Typical tasks include consolidating sources, normalising attributes and units, filling technical gaps, mapping supplier files into one structure and linking the right assets to each SKU.

This is what makes a PIM work on day one. Otherwise you just move messy data into a new system and keep the same problems.

Can we manage digital assets in the PIM?

Yes, either natively or via DAM. The key point is that you need to link these assets to SKUs and use AI to automate varying renditions for each channel.

We're planning to move into new markets. How do we handle translations?

Use AI-assisted localisation with a terminology base. Keep human review for high-risk copy (in terms of volume of sales).

Don't Buy for Today; Buy for What's Next



Choosing the wrong PIM can set you back years. It drains budget, slows teams down and creates frustration that is hard to recover from. Most businesses only make this decision once every ten years, so the pressure to get it right is real.

That is why a clear plan matters. You need to understand what your business actually needs, how your teams work and what your future channels will demand. A shiny feature list will not protect you from the wrong choice.

The winning teams on the digital shelf are the ones with strong processes, good governance and a platform that can grow with them. PIM gives you the foundation. AI gives you the speed. Together they make your product data work harder across every channel.

Dozens of organisations have trusted us to help them choose a PIM, reduce risk and move forward with confidence.



If you want support in turning this guide into a practical, stakeholder ready plan, we can help. We work with you to shape requirements, shortlist vendors and run a selection process you can trust.

If you want to choose your PIM with confidence and avoid costly missteps, **book a free PIM discovery call.**

Glossary:

24 terms which cut through the complexity

Attribute: A data point that describes a product (for example colour or size).

Audit trail: A record of who changed what and when. Helps with control and trust.

Bundle: A group of products sold together (for example a drill plus bits).

CDP (customer data platform): A system that unifies customer data. Helps tailor product content.

Channel: The place you sell or show products (for example Amazon, your site, a distributor).

Completeness score: A measure of how much required data you have filled in.

Composable: A stack built from modular parts that you can swap in and out.

Connector: A pre-built link between systems that moves data with less custom code.

Data lineage: Proof of where data came from and how it changed.

Data model: The structure that defines product types, attributes and relationships.

DAM (digital asset management): Stores images, videos and documents and links them to SKUs.

Digital shelf: How products appear and compete online across all channels.

Enrichment: Adding or improving product data, like writing better titles or adding specs.

ERP (enterprise resource planning): The system of record for operations like pricing and stock.

Governance: The policies, roles and checks that keep data accurate and safe.

GTIN/UPC/EAN: Universal product identifiers used for barcodes.

Headless: A system where the front end is separate from the back end, so you can build your own experiences.

Localisation: Adapting content for a region or language, not just translating it.

Marketplace: A site where many sellers list products, such as Amazon or eBay.

PIM (product information management): The platform that manages and publishes product data.

PXM (product experience management): Using product data and assets to shape the customer experience.

RBAC (role-based access control): Permissions based on roles (for example editor or approver).

SLA (service level agreement): A rule for timing and quality (for example approve new copy in two days).

Syndication: Sending product data to places where customers see it (for example channels or partners).



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