

*A GUIDE FOR BRANDS
& MANUFACTURERS*

HOW TO WIN ON THE DIGITAL SHELF



INTRODUCTION

Product information goes beyond technical data—it influences how consumers perceive and interact with products. The effectiveness of the digital shelf plays a crucial role in shaping both the product experience and customer experience management. To enhance the purchasing journey, it is essential to disseminate contextualised, adapted, and tailored product information that is specific to each channel. Consumers not only access this information during their customer journey but also emotionally respond to the overall experience.

For those embarking on the omnichannel digital shelf journey, there are key priorities to address: ensuring consistency across channels, allocating necessary resources, managing new channel setup efforts, and establishing trust in product data.

In this ebook, we provide actionable insights to help brands and manufacturers streamline their product information management. By understanding the importance of an outcomes-focused strategy for the digital shelf, you can leverage Product Information Management (PIM) solutions to achieve success. Whether you are a B2C brand or a B2B manufacturer, learn how PIM can empower you to win on the digital shelf.

Discover the significance of the digital shelf for brands and manufacturers, explore its relation to product information, and understand how PIM can be the foundation of a successful digital shelf launch.

What will you learn?

This eBook will show you just why Product Information Management (PIM) is at the heart of a successful launch for your digital shelf. For brands selling direct to customers, and for Manufacturers selling into B2B markets, the conception, use and exploitation of 'the digital shelf' should be taking prime position in strategic planning.

What the digital shelf is in relation to brands and manufacturers.

Why the digital shelf is important for brands and manufacturers.

How a PIM solution can help you win on the digital shelf, whether you are a B2C brand or a B2B manufacturer.

WHAT IS THE DIGITAL SHELF?

The digital shelf is the representation, visibility, and offer of a brand's products on any digital channel:

- A brand or manufacturer's eCommerce platform
- Third-party marketplaces
- Mobile apps
- Mobile-optimised websites
- A physical store's digital pricing and inventory control

These rapidly developing digital touchpoints are used by purchasers to engage with brands in order to find, research, and buy products.

The target purchaser will spend time researching key information for what will be a carefully chosen item. They will be strongly influenced by some or all of the components of the digital shelf.

88%

of shoppers say they rely on digital product content to decide what to buy

What are the components of the Digital Shelf?



Product Information



Instructions



Product Range



Ratings



Product Availability



Reviews



Digital Assets



Pricing



Descriptions



Promotions

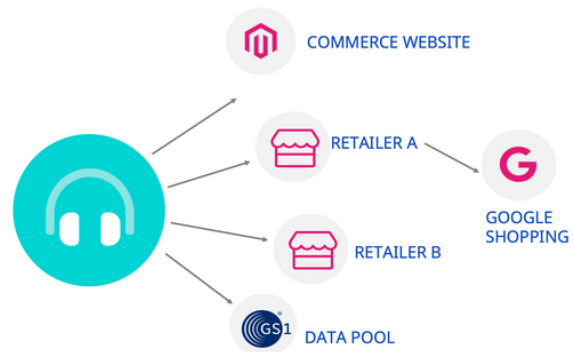
The digital shelf for brands

Brands typically sell via:

- Their own eCommerce website
- Retailers: stores, or large marketplaces such as Amazon, Google Shopping, Shopify or eBay.
- Data pools like GS1, for sale to 3rd-party retailers and sellers requiring a reliable and valid source of product information for a given SKU.

In a supermarket, department store or fashion store, the products at eye level or in 'hot spots' are the most profitable as it is the easiest place for customers to look. Likewise, positioning yourself on the digital shelf is critical.

A TYPICAL BRAND



The digital shelf is your online footprint and is not only an eCommerce platform. It expands to mobile apps, third-party reseller platforms and search rankings - wherever your brand is featured. Failure to optimise these elements is like asking your customers to bend down and squint at the labels on the bottom shelf.

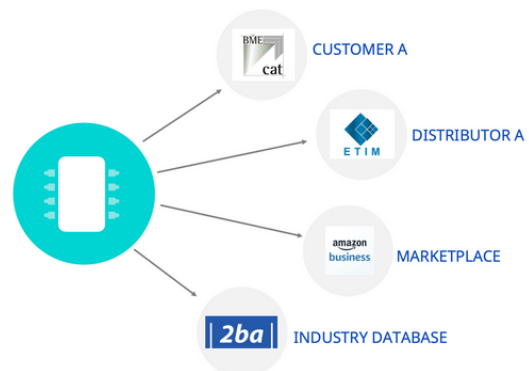
The digital shelf for manufacturers

Manufacturers typically sell to:

- The customer directly from their own eCommerce platform
- Distributors, who then sell on to customers and outlets
- B2B marketplaces such as Alibaba, Amazon Business, or Oro
- Industry databases, such as eCat, ETIM or IceCat

When it comes to manufacturers the B2B customer experience is based less on the emotional impact of the product data. The B2B purchase is driven by how it is displayed, and more on the buyer's pragmatic need for relevant, contextualised, and complete information about a given product.

A TYPICAL B2B MANUFACTURER



For both manufacturers and brands, the buyer sees the digital shelf very much as soul of the brand and expects to see all information content as a reflection of how a brand makes a compelling case to the customer.

WHY IS THE SHELF IMPORTANT FOR YOU AS A BRAND OR MANUFACTURER?

The Customer

In eCommerce, the balance of power has shifted definitively towards buyers. They have become more aware of their influence through the implementation of consumer-focused technologies and real-time access to key comparative information. The customer journey is more connected and immersive,

with touchpoints accessed by multiple devices in multiple locations. The quality and breadth of product information is a key driver of customer behaviour, as abandoned shopping carts or product returns are largely provoked by unreliable, incomplete, and incorrect product information.

Types of customers

Brand consumers

Consumer behaviour and attitudes have evolved more rapidly than predicted, with a pandemic driving increased eCommerce volume. A given brand's value proposition has never been more important. Potential purchasers are willing to spend more time researching and comparing their desired purchase, so they need accurate and up to date information on issues that are increasingly relevant:

- Sustainability
- Supply chain transparency
- Regulatory and legal compliance
- Compliance with standards required by large-scale online marketplaces and retailers
- Rating and reviews

B2B purchasers

This is a significantly different kind of customer. Firstly, they frequently repeat buy. Pricing is often personalised, based on a long-standing relationship between purchaser and brand – price needs to be flexible and the seller may offer various payment options.

The purchasing process is more complex than that of B2C. B2B buyers are not as impulsive as B2C, and the purchasing journey frequently involves other parties. They are looking for:

- Technical data
- Materials and safety data
- Supply chain data

Therefore, manufacturers, need their digital shelf to be a research site too; B2B buyers demand more than basic data to make an informed decision, so all channels should be consistent in offering a breadth of often technical information, such as a comprehensive list of attributes, to aid comparison.

90%

of B2B purchasers will turn to a competitor if a supplier's digital channel can't keep up with their needs.



A brand or manufacturer...

WITH PIM

- ✓ Stronger brand identity
- ✓ Greater reach and exposure to customers
- ✓ Easier to expand to new marketplaces
- ✓ Consistent omnichannel experience

WITHOUT PIM

- ✗ Inconsistent brand experience
- ✗ Messy and confusing data
- ✗ Poor quality data prevents marketplace listings
- ✗ Lower conversion rate

Why is the digital shelf important?

64%

of consumer packaged goods (CPG) sales growth driven from e-commerce

34.5%

forecasted growth rate of online shopping in UK in 2023

95%

of shopping will be facilitated by e-commerce by 2040

77%

of in-store purchases are influenced by digital advertising

\$6.5 trillion

by 2023 in expected worldwide eCommerce sales

Product Experience Management (PXM) and Customer Experience Management (CXM) for brands and manufacturers

Accurate, wide-ranging and, certainly for brands, emotive product content, is fundamental for the customer experience. The right and relevant information on product page is critical in the customer journey, and if they get this right, both brands and manufacturers will see a measurable improvement in conversion rates.

CXM and PXM, the digital shelf, and the customer

Omnichannel meets the target consumers where they are, not where you want them to be.

The omnichannel customer experience is notable for its randomness. It needs to allow customers to research and shop across a wide range of platforms, online, in-store or, in the case of B2B, from a data pool like Icecat, experiencing a problem-free and fruitful interaction with the product (and, by extension, the brand).

Consistent information quality across all touch points on every channel signals strong brand identity, leading to increased conversions, cross-selling and up-selling far more likely.

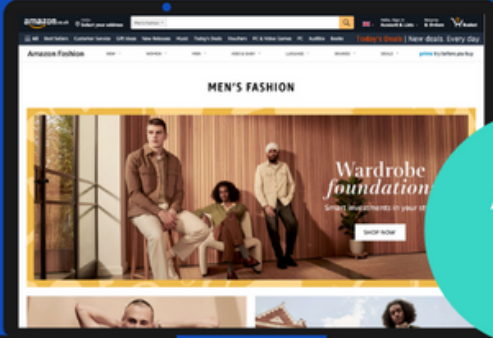
74%

of consumers are at least somewhat likely to buy based on experiences alone

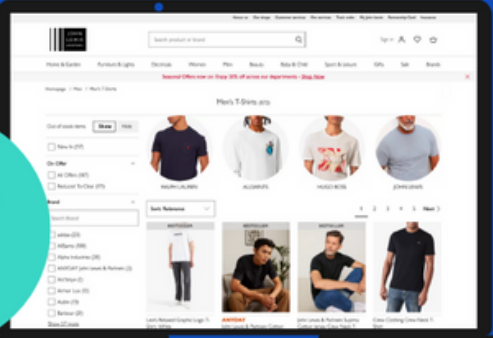
Case Study: The Brand

A clothing company was experiencing data quality issues. Data was manually maintained on spreadsheets with poor version control, which led to inconsistencies between the brand site and the marketplace sites.

A PIM with strong syndication capabilities was needed to improve content quality and consistency, and the business processes needed to change to support the new PIM. We designed new processes to support the adoption of the PIM and improve data quality and data governance.

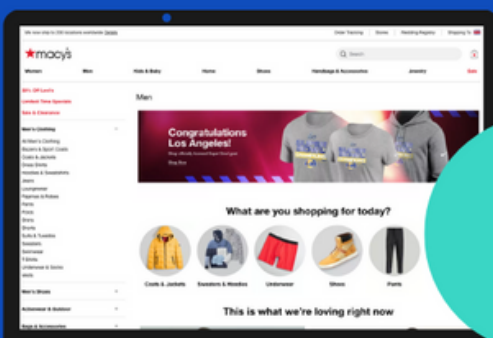


Amazon
73

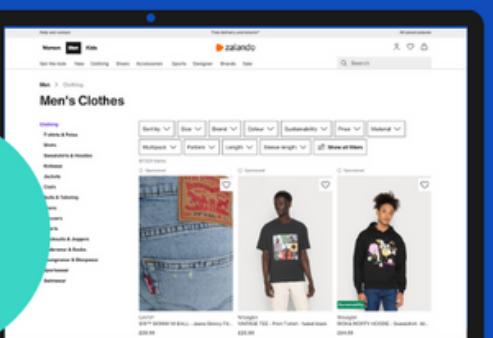


John Lewis
120

Attributes required to sell a Men's T-Shirt



Macy's
40



Zalando
43

Attributes
required to
sell a monitor
mount

Amazon
49

Icecat
50

Case Study: The Manufacturer

A manufacturer of computer accessories was experiencing issues with data quality, as their distributors were completing their Icecat product data, rather than the manufacturer themselves.

To take back control of their data, the manufacturer decided that they needed to syndicate directly to Icecat, rather than relying on distributors to enrich this information. As lots of their products shared information, we built an inheritance structure to allow enrichment to take place across multiple products at once.

HOW CAN A PIM HELP YOU WIN ON THE DIGITAL SHELF?

Product data, PIM and the digital shelf

Your digital shelf will stand or fall on the quality of the product information you provide for the buyer. A PIM solution will ensure that the data you use will be of a high-quality standard, is the unique correct version and will be consistent across all the channels you sell on.

Traditional product information management approaches

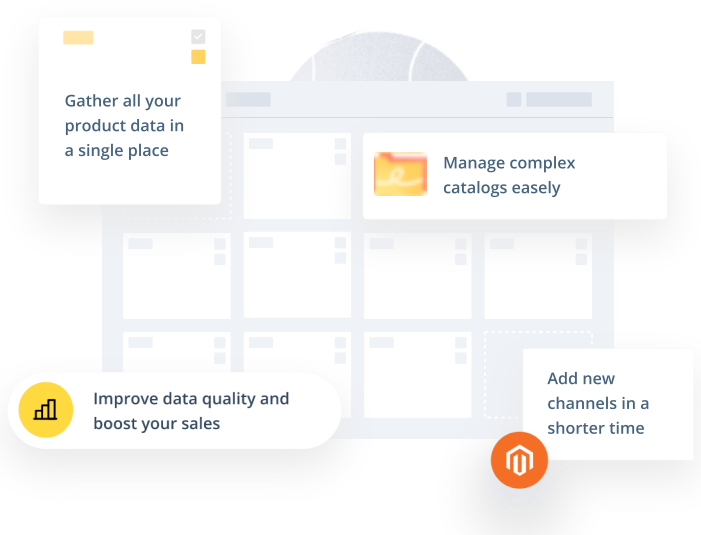
‘Old school’ methods relied greatly on manual data processing across the organisation. These practices are still evident nowadays, where companies clearly do not have the requisite control over their product data:

- A lack of a unified approach to governance and verification procedures for data standards, resulting in inconsistencies among departments dealing with product data.
- These information ‘silos’ mean dirty data on your shelf in terms of reliability and consistency.
- No centralised product data hub, meaning no guarantee that the data being used by each department is of sufficiently high standard.

Even if you select a great PIM solution there are some typical problems when failing to use effective methods of product information management. Get these foundations right and you will get the real benefits of using a PIM to populate your digital shelf with efficiently managed product data.

- Manual processing is too slow to adjust existing information in almost real time.

Data Governance, Data Quality, Product Data Taxonomy and Product data enrichment are crucial factors involved in successfully addressing the issues above before implementing any PIM solution.



Where does a PIM solution come in?

All in all, the combination of added value elements which a PIM brings to your digital shelf strategy will allow your teams to focus on the important tasks to craft, create and enhance the product data to offer you a competitive advantage with a superior customer experience. The PIM leaves this information ready to use across all

possible channels, optimised to provide a seamless omnichannel experience.

A PIM solution can enable product data syndication to any channel, optimise processes to get to market faster and sell more anywhere all the time.

Product data syndication

Key trends are shaping the landscape and putting greater demands on this area:

- A growing number and complexity of channels.
- An increasing complexity in those channels regarding tailoring product data for channel-readiness. An increase in channels requiring tailored product data and content
- Constant changes in reseller retailer requirements concerning the conditions in which they will accept data.
- The exponential growth in new PIM and syndication technologies, in particular, their broadening functionalities and increasingly powerful capabilities.

Once this categorisation process has taken place, your data is optimised and boasts the following positive characteristics:

- **High quality:** clean, comprehensive, suitably enriched, and totally accurate.
- **Customised:** validated, structured, and tailored for the format requirements of each and every channel used.
- **Contextualised:** your data is unified but not uniform, so key product attributes like size and price are consistent. Your message, however, is now adapted to the unique channel.
- **Compliant** with the requirements of the reseller platform.

Efficient and effective use of a PIM will streamline three main processes:

1. **Preparation** of your product data feeds for any channel
2. **Collection** of missing or value-added product information
3. **Integration** with your range of retail and shopping channels.

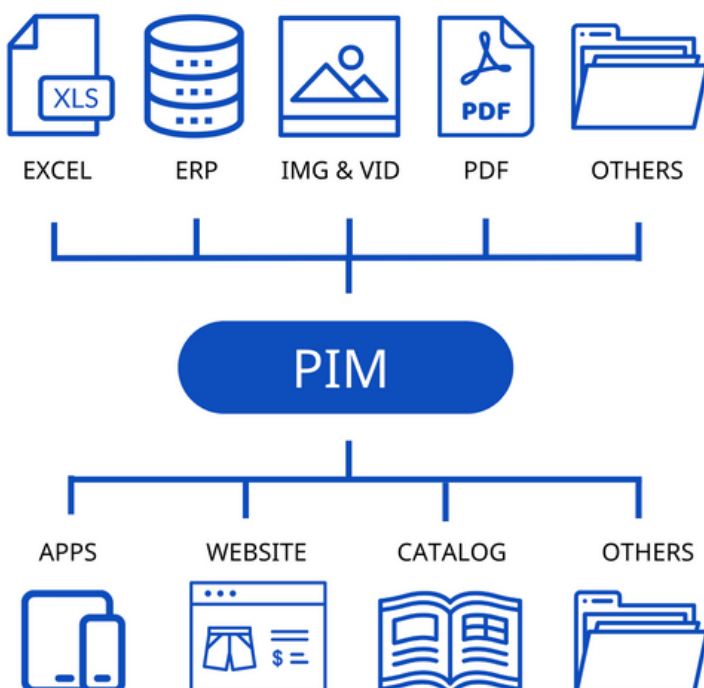
Optimised processes

With efficiency as a business aim, the attributes of a PIM enable the key drivers:

- Centralised product data hub
- Governed verification
- Access rights-control
- Scalability when introducing new lines, categories or expanding to new markets

These allow modern PIM systems to provide:

- Standardisation of data points and concepts such as naming protocols. Constant monitoring and timely reporting on data quality
- Cleansing and 'decontamination' of incorrect or inaccurate data
- Creation of a consistent, business-wide taxonomy and efficient hierarchy
- Integration and complimentary services alongside existing ERP systems management
- Automated de-duplication processes



Sell more anywhere, all the time

How does a PIM impact your bottom line? Where you have centralised, enriched, accurate, updated, and complete product data, your marketing, sales and other teams can act with speed and efficiency. Less time to market is required to distribute data to the relevant channels, with compliant product information specific to each one. In a nutshell, the right product at the right time and the right price. This will increase conversion rates, optimise cross- and up-selling opportunities and reduce abandoned shopping carts.

Whether for brands or manufacturers, a modern PIM offers baseline capabilities which will help both types of business become more efficient, cost-effective, and revenue generating:

- A centralised hub for product data
- Governance-verified data points and sets: the 'Single Source of Truth'
- Automation of several high-frequency functions
- Opportunities to quickly scale product range and volume
- Reduced time to market
- Payback in cost-efficiency through business process optimisation

5 things you should be doing to win on the digital shelf

1

Focus on your **core products, key attributes for your website** and **required attributes for channels** – this allows you to target enrichment at the areas which will bring the most rewards.

2

Set clear data quality standards, considering channel requirements. This will mean you are able to measure data quality and focus on key areas to improve.

3

Build a taxonomy to categorise your products without duplication. It's simpler for your customers to find products they are looking for and means that you can map to your marketplace categories easily. It also allows you to inherit shared data from higher levels of the taxonomy, saving you time and effort in enrichment.

4

Take advantage of automated workflows within a PIM, to simplify enrichment and automatically de-duplicate data whilst maintaining quality standards.

5

Choose a **PIM with in-built syndication capabilities** to accelerate your speed to market.

About Start with Data

Start with Data is a consultancy focused on enabling retailers, manufacturers, and distributors to get their product data and processes into tip-top shape and keep them there—so they can compete and thrive in today's competitive digital economy.

Where are you on your journey to product data greatness? Whether you need help devising a winning strategy, selecting, or implementing the right platforms to meet your business goals, or need help managing your product information and systems on an ongoing basis—we've got you covered.

Explore our comprehensive range of services and discover how we can help you transform your product information challenges into business benefits. So, you can fuel revenue growth, free up your team, and reduce costs and risk.

Learn more about the value Start with Data provide at startwithdata.co.uk

