

Product Information Manager— How Your Company Can Benefit

The GXS Product Information Manager (PIM) solution provides standardized item data capture, ongoing management, and related information distribution processes across key business divisions. With PIM you will benefit from greatly improved internal business processes related to product-related data capture and flow.

In general, manufacturers utilize many different forms at various points in their product data flow. These forms are in several states: Some are office application-based such as Microsoft Excel and Word, while others are paper-based and are completed manually in different departments during different phases in the flow of item data. In addition, there are different systems ranging from the Intranet site to databases to product-related enterprise applications. Each has its own unique function either in new product data flow, existing product change requests, or both. Further, some are independent of others, while many require either automated or manual prompting for the item data flow process to continue its path.

For most companies, the flow of item-related data and the corresponding web of interrelated systems and paper-based processes that facilitate the flow is extremely complex.

GXS Key Findings

- **Manual Processes:** The item data management process usually includes no fewer than ten (10) manually created and maintained forms. Forms are faxed and physically handed to different groups for input and/or approval.
- **Redundant Data:** In many instances, the same information is entered into a number of different forms and systems.
- **Ownership:** Appropriately disparate functions associated with item data management unnecessarily result in multiple functional units needing to own the same information and needing to maintain it separately because of the absence of a central data repository. Because of the extent to which item data and associated processes are almost exclusively managed by individuals, there is a great deal of tacit knowledge that the organization is at risk of losing through the natural attrition of employees.
- **System Interoperability:** There is a complex web of systems in place. The complexity is exacerbated by the lack of integration between them and necessity of employees to manually input data into many of these systems.
- **Change Control:** Changes are often lost or difficult to track.
- **Communication:** Communication is critical to the consistency and efficacy of item data management. The lack of a comprehensive, integrated item data management strategy causes costly breakdowns in the manual communication of item data flow.



Key Findings	Benefit of Improvement	Expense Reduction or Revenue Enhancement
Manual Processes	Reduced error rate, improved data accuracy, improved employee utilization, faster time-to-market, improved customer relationships	Both
Redundant Data	Better data consistency, improved employee utilization, reduced error rate, improved customer relationships	Both
Process Ownership	Retention of tacit knowledge, improved accountability, improved employee utilization, improved time-to-market	Both
System Interoperability	Reduced error rate, improved data accuracy, improved employee utilization	Expense Reduction
Change Control	Improved data accuracy, faster time-to-market, improved customer relationships	Both
Communication	Improved data consistency, improved employee utilization, improved time-to-market	Both

Product Information Manager

GXS's PIM solution is a system that consolidates product information from multiple sources in multiple formats in a central repository and enables an organization to create, edit, and disseminate that information enabling a consistent set of processes.

With PIM in place, you can expect a dramatically streamlined item data management process with the following benefits:

- **Faster time-to-market:** PIM will reduce the cycle time required to introduce new products and process changes to existing products.
- **Lower operating costs:** PIM will reduce duplication of effort, automate manual processes, improve employee utilization, and reduce error rates.
- **Improve customer relationships:** PIM will provide your organization with the ability to manage customer specific content, pricing and promotion, and to deliver consistently accurate product information.
- **Increase sales:** PIM will help drive revenue by delivering up-to-date product information and reducing product errors and product returns.

Manual Processes/Data Redundancy

The manual process through which item maintenance is conducted results in several instances of data redundancy. The primary cause of the redundancy is that many individuals at your business need access to the same item data, but lack a central repository from which to retrieve the data. Of all the various input formats used, it can be argued that the ERP system is capable of fulfilling the role of a central repository as it contains most of the item data in question. A central repository, however, must have some inherent traits for it to be used effectively, each of which the ERP system lacks:

Central Data Repository (Catalog)	Existing ERP System
Contains ALL item data	All item data is not in ERP
Accessible by all relevant parties	Some people do not have access to ERP
Updates all dependent applications in automated fashion	Some applications are updated but not all
Data is accurate and have the confidence of the people using it	Employees have low confidence levels in ERP data

Product Information Management

Background

The continuing evolution of e-business presents organizations of all sizes with significant challenges. In particular, the manner in which organizations manage product information can either exacerbate or diminish the challenge of doing business electronically. Effectively identifying, capturing, managing, storing, and disseminating product information is increasingly becoming a competitive differentiator in the marketplace.

Suppliers and manufacturers face significant obstacles in reducing internal inefficiencies and in meeting the requirements of demand-side partners. Organizations large and small are finding that business critical product information, more often than not, resides in multiple legacy systems and is supported by costly manual effort. The end result is product data that is redundant, inconsistent, incomplete, and inaccurate.

The cause of this is commonplace. Multiple parties in an extended enterprise product information chain require different types of product content for various purposes. This has resulted in these parties creating and modifying product data to meet their requirements and storing the data in a department specific system or even on local hard drives in Excel or Access files. These kinds of non-integrated solutions impede product data flow, data accuracy and consistency and, ultimately, time to market.

Existing processes for the management of product-related data are the result of the incremental acquisition of disparate software systems and development of homegrown systems to meet expanding requirements. These steps were often taken independently of other efforts and, therefore, were not part of a larger well-formulated strategy. Furthermore, most ERP systems support limited product-related information. Product information is no longer required only at the item level, but at the individual attribute level. Because this complexity is not supported by ERP systems, companies have resorted to storing product information in disparate systems and locations.

Organizations are beginning to realize the inefficiencies and resulting costs that are associated with maintaining duplicate product information for multiple internal purposes and demand channels. There is a compelling need for a central repository of product information that is capable of coherently storing and efficiently facilitating the dissemination of accurate information in multiple formats to various channels.

What is Product Information?

Product information encompasses much more than the data that identifies a specific term (e.g. name, description, pricing, dimensions, specifications, etc.). Product information can and should include, but is not limited to, the following:

- **Taxonomy:** product classifications both internally and externally
- **Relationships:** containment, packaging, bundling, linked items, etc.
- **Marketing:** markets, competitive information, features/benefits, promotions, catalog descriptions, online content/links, images, etc.
- **Sales:** pricing, discounting, projections, etc.
- **People Relationships:** product, distribution, marketing, sales, government compliance, UPC control, customers, etc.
- **Technology Infrastructure:** ERP, databases, spreadsheets, financial systems, etc.
- **Production:** schedules, status, etc.

What is Product Information Management?

Product information management is something you do everyday. It is the people, systems, processes and methods of communication that you leverage to create, store, access, manipulate, and distribute product information. The efficiency of your product information management efforts can significantly impact the efficiency of your internal processes, your relationships with trading partners and, ultimately, your bottom line.

From a technology agnostic perspective, a Product Information Management solution (PIM) is a system that consolidates product information from multiple sources in multiple formats in a central repository and enables an organization to create, edit, and disseminate that information enabling a consistent set of processes including:

- Data Extraction
- Data Aggregation
- Data Normalization
- Rationalization
- Standardization
- Data Cleansing
- Data Enrichment
- Single-source Editing
- Item Linking and Containment

Internally, a comprehensive PIM solution provides an organization with the ability to house and manage all product-related information in a central repository. Once product data is in a central, controlled location, an organization can then use the PIM to standardize product data, add missing rich data components and implement business workflow processes in order to maintain the data without the error and duplication inherent in multiple sources.

Externally, PIM provides an organization with the foundation necessary to confidently and efficiently communicate with its demand-side partners.

Why a Product Information Management Solution?

Product information is the lifeblood of your company. Your product information permeates every internal system and affects each of your trading partners and every customer. In an

increasingly collaborative business environment, a solid product information management strategy provides the foundation from which your organization can do business electronically and realize all the benefits of doing so.

Specifically, a PIM solution can provide the internal infrastructure that will enable your organization to accomplish two key objectives:

- Control and reduce the cost of maintaining disparate and redundant product information systems and processes, and
- Confidently maintain a consistent, complete, compliant, and clean set of data about its products.

At the business level, product information is becoming expensive and time-consuming to maintain and virtually impossible to fully leverage. Because business users have equally diverse ways of looking at product data depending on their function, a PIM application can support multiple business processes and serve many users, each with a different functional responsibility and business requirements. In cases where different parties need the same information, the PIM can allow them to retrieve it from a central repository and export only the information components they need. Internally, a PIM solution will result in streamlined internal communication; improved data flow among departments, and overall improved efficiency.

At the industry level, an every-growing number of customer touch points, continuously shortening product lifecycles and increasing demand for accurate and complete product information in the demand chain make a product information management solution a mission critical undertaking.

At a high level, the GXS PIM solution:

- Allows organizations to leverage investments in legacy systems by sourcing product data from existing internal systems;
- Permits customization for unique internal business processes and workflow;
- Captures and organizes product data in a single, dynamic data repository; and
- Allows individual users to enrich the product data with end-user friendly descriptions and labels.

Your process may consist of an inefficient web of multiple, redundant points of distribution, data entry and re-distribution back and forth between departments. This occurs because your business lacks a tool that can automate data aggregation and process flow and facilitate centralized storage.

The PIM would bring your business the following benefits:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Single Source Entry | • Foundation for Electronic |
| • Change Control | Collaboration |
| • Single Source Retrieval | • Customizable |
| • Data Redundancy Reduction | • Searchable |
| • Interface with Legacy Systems | • Scalable |

Single Source Entry

A significant benefit of the PIM is a single source of entry for all item information. This benefit alone will greatly reduce time and costs compared to current item maintenance. The catalog also would eliminate completely the need for request forms, as the data is readily available via a single source.

Change Control

Change control becomes much more manageable from a data perspective, as only one system needs to be updated when a change occurs. All other systems and/or processes are dependent on the PIM. A change to it would inherently produce a change to all downstream systems and forms through aggregation and dissemination either real-time or via batch process.

Single Source Retrieval

Just as item information in the PIM can be entered once into a single location, it can also be retrieved from this same source. Reporting is a basic tenant of the catalog and greatly reduces, if not eliminates, the need for redundant data entry.

Data Redundancy Reduction

The concept of single source entry is based on the premise that redundant data entry is time consuming, costly and susceptible to errors. By entering data once into the PIM, redundant data and the possibility of data entry errors can be reduced significantly from the item maintenance landscape.

Integration with Legacy Systems

Another premise of the PIM is its ability to integrate with existing systems. Interfaces to ERP, database and other applications serve to source all other downstream systems. In addition, reporting and/or extracts from the catalog can be utilized to source documents such as specifications.

Provides the Foundation for Electronic Collaboration

A PIM can provide the internal, single-source foundation for electronic collaboration that can feed a data synchronization solution that will enable your business to communicate with trading partners in a consistent, compliant manner. It provides the data integrity required for data synchronization.

Customizable

The PIM is highly customizable to account for different requirements.

Searchable

A key part of streamlining item data management processes is to ensure that your organization's PIM is searchable. This searchable repository prevents the consumption of time required to gather data from one or more disparate sources. A central, searchable repository will allow individuals in the item data process flow to find relevant information quickly and to be confident that it is correct and current.

Scalable

An additional key component of a the PIM is its ability to scale to meet both product requirements and user requirements. As an organization grows the need may occur to add additional steps in the item data flow process. It scales to accommodate an increasing number of those users. Likewise, as organizations add products and customers, the catalog can scale to accommodate an increasing breadth of products and a more complex demand chain.

The functionality in the GXS PIM will provide your organization with customizable workflow and process management tools. User access control functionality will allow access to only the most relevant data. In addition, it provides automated validation checkpoints through the process cycle through business process specific rules.

In Summary

In summary, the GXS PIM will provide your organization with the internal infrastructure to:

- Decrease the unnecessary time spent by employees on manual data entry and the accompanying paper flow;
- Improve employee efficiency;
- Improve data accuracy;
- Improve data accessibility;
- Reduce error susceptibility; and
- Collaborate electronically.

About GXS

GXS is a leading provider of B2B e-commerce solutions that simplify and enhance business process integration and collaboration. Organizations worldwide, including 75 percent of the Fortune 500, leverage GXS' GS1 certified global interoperability and supply chain execution solutions. Active in the global standards arena, GXS offers solutions, powered by the Trading GridSM, that enable customers both large and small, to connect with global partners, synchronize product information and optimize the execution of supply chains.

Headquartered in Gaithersburg, MD., GXS provides sales and support to businesses and their partners worldwide. For more information about GXS visit www.gxs.com.



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