

PIM – A BETTER PRODUCT DATABASE

From physical to digital product

Introduction

This white paper explains how a PIM solution can take work off your hands while updating your product data, and ensure that you always dispose of consistent and current product data to exchange with your customers. With this document, Compano would like to provide some clarity in this complex matter, such that you can make an informed decision about investing in a PIM application.



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Use of data

Companies want to use item and product data for multiple communication purposes. In addition to different target audiences, various data formats and languages make exchanging data even more complex. It is not uncommon for every department or official to have its own source or destination for data.

How about your company? Are you already using your data with the following applications in mind?

Marketing

- Consumer website
- B2B website
- Web shop
- Catalogue or Brochure (printed or digital)
- Apps
- Business mailing

Product Management

- Product sheet
- Intranet

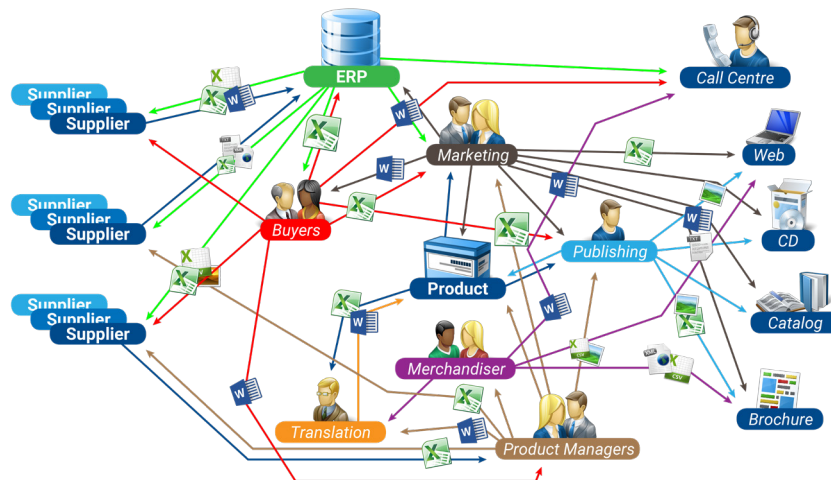
Sales

- Data files for customers
- Data files for data pools
- Product recommendation

If there are multiple applications for your data, a PIM solution could be a real asset.

For example: Your product website offers excellent sales information for customers, but is not tailored to the needs of a more technically oriented plumbing company?

Using a PIM system as a basis for your product data will enable you to use different publication structures based, for instance, on item groups versus product groups. One publication structure then generates a web feed for a more marketing-oriented website for consumers, while the other publication structure is better suited for a technical B2B website.



DIGITAL DATA OR PAPER CATALOGUE?

Some customers still prefer an overview of your products on paper. This could be a simple product sheet, a somewhat more extensive price list or a complex catalog.

Simple product sheets and price lists can be generated using the PIM system. Should you need a more complex layout for a catalogue, then it is more convenient to use Adobe InDesign.

Unlimited design with Adobe InDesign

When using professional DTP software, such as Adobe InDesign, layout options are limitless. Yet, while InDesign will provide the layout, a smart link with your PIM system will fill your catalogue with up-to-date product and item data.

COLLABORATE THROUGH SHARING

These days the possibilities for data sharing are endless. Whether, installer, modeller, wholesaler, or web shop, they all need reliable product information as a basis for their assortments and stocks.

Often, these 'end users' of your data rely on so called data pools to download your data for re-use in their ERP system, website or web shop.

Data pool

In the Netherlands, Artikelbeheer.nl and 2BA are data pools that focus on the construction and installation sectors. The data pool for Belgium is Installdata.be. A data pool allows you to either download data of a manufacturer or distributor, or you can upload your own product and item data for distribution to your customers.

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Origin of data

Often product data is a blend of information from different sources within the company. Manual transfer or input of data is very time consuming. Using a PIM system you can handle data in different formats or maybe read data directly from you ERP system.

Keep in mind that, besides price, stock and technical specification, product data can also comprise of photographs, drawings, manuals, certificates and more. Information on your product can therefore have multiple sources, such as:

- Manufacturers
- Suppliers
- Wholesalers
- Data pools
- Translation agencies
- Copywriters
- Marketing agencies
- Photographers
- Industry portals
- Own website (reviews)

Considering all possible information scenarios and application possibilities beforehand will allow you to optimize processes and minimize time-consuming data-entry jobs.

For instance, if you already have some of the product data in your ERP system and images and documents are stored on a media server, then a PIM system can help unlock this information by adding relevant links to products and items. Automation of data import is also often an option, in which case your only job will be to enrich (new) products with images, manuals or other attachments. An example of this would be a marketing department that links media such as product photos or atmospheric images to your products.



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Complexity

Before you start with a PIM system, it is important that you ask yourself how you would like to use your product and item data and which data you already have collected. Depending on your (immediate) goals, an option would be to implement a PIM system in multiple phases.

Datapool

For example, should you want to publish your data at a data pool, then your main concern should be trade data such as height, weight, description and gross price. This will get you well on your way, provided you can easily import this information from your ERP.

Classification

The situation becomes a bit more complex if classification of technical product data is required, according to an industry standard such as ETIM or GS1. Not only should the PIM system of your choice support this kind of classification, it should also be able to handle future changes within these standards in such a way that you will understand which data needs to be adjusted.

Multi-language

If you run an international business, which languages do you need to reach your goals? Should your PIM system also be multi-lingual, so that your colleagues abroad can maintain a country-specific assortment? Some PIM systems not only offer a translation of the user interface, but also allow for multi-lingual data fields and selection lists.

Building Information Modeling

In near future, Building Information Modeling (BIM) will play an important role in the building and installation industry. Some PIM systems already handle BIM data using ETIM MC, and will allow you to enter building object parameters and connect these data to a CAD system such as Revit.

Structured information

A PIM system should offer you the option to structure information and make use of a clever data hierarchy to facilitate data-entry. For instance, in some cases one product image or manual would apply to a whole group of products. By recording this information at a product group level, both image and manual could be passed on to all underlying products. This structuring of information will save you a lot of time, and repetitive work, which therefore reduce the number of errors in your product data.



BIM, HOW THE BUILDING SECTOR CO-OPERATES

BIM has been adopted by all major parties within the building sector. Manufacturers acknowledge that using the same standards greatly benefits the whole building process. By using standards, the quality of work increases, less errors are made and information within building models can be exchanged more easily.

These standards allow for the development and use of modeling objects in CAD and BIM software and thus make modeling of buildings and installations possible, including spatial relationships, light analysis, geographic information, and quantities and properties of building components, such as cost, sustainability, life-cycle, and more.

BIM Objects

In order to design a three-dimensional object, a lot of information is required. To simplify the maintenance of this information, general models can be used. These models are provided by ETIM or could be manual created by your own organisation or software partner.

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SINGLE SOURCE OF TRUTH

Keep tight control of your digital product by centralizing all data management at your PIM system. Keep a grip on the digital product through your PIM system.

Your products find the market through a growing number of online and offline sales channels. And more often than ever, it is your digital product that is at the heart of sales. Seen this way, your digital product is just as important as your tangible, physical product.

This is why it is of vital importance to reliably manage and keep up-to-date all information about your product.

More and more companies acknowledge the importance of good data quality and appoint a PIM manager.

Benefits of a PIM

- ✓ Always up to date
- ✓ Reliable data
- ✓ Uniform data
- ✓ A short time-to-market
- ✓ Well-informed and therefore satisfied customers
- ✓ More sales

PIM Process

Within PIM software three sub-processes can be distinguished:

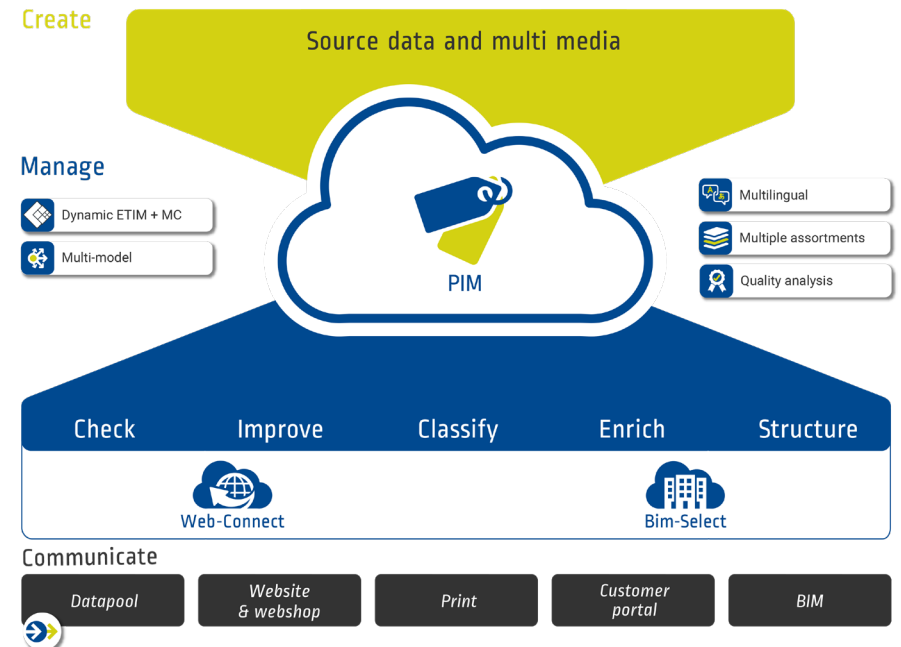
Create: Import product and item data from different data sources and in different data formats (for instance, text files, PDFs, images, Excel sheets), into your PIM system. By synchronizing your data source (ERP, image database) with the PIM system, data changes within your data source immediately become apparent in your PIM system.

Manage: Control, improve, structure and enrich data in one central location. Product classification was never done so quickly and easy. Add digital media to products and structure for publication. Create multiple assortments for different customer groups in different languages.

Communicate: Share information to other software packages for print, PDF or websites. Send data to various data pools with one touch of a button. Or, send BIM data directly to your CAD software. Communicate product data with your customers in a way that helps their business.

This way, data in your PIM system will be refreshed daily and can be accessed at any time, even -if desired- in real-time by linking your PIM to external sources and applications. You decide with what formats, method and frequency data is updated, and your customer always gets the most current and reliable information.

No matter where your product information gets shown, this way there is always only -“one single source of truth”- your PIM system.



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Integration

Of course it is your choice if you would like to enter all data manually into a PIM system. However, in most cases this will prove an impossible task. A knowledgeable PIM consultant should help you to set-up smart connections with your existing ERP system. Sometimes, it will be your ERP system that will be leading and the process starts there, but more and more the enriched data within PIM is imported back into the ERP system to enrich the data there.

A well-done PIM implementation unburdens your organization by helping you to fill the data system and compile exports and feeds.

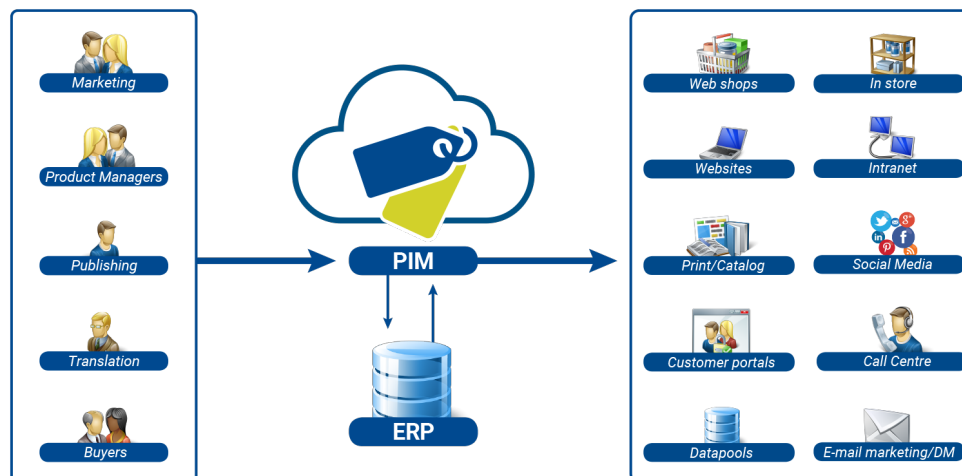
Should you choose standard online PIM software then usually few customer-specific adaptations are required; updates and improvements are automatically implemented so you always work with the current software version.

Some data scenarios require a dedicated application, which can make use of customer-specific fields needed for your business operations. Simply because you need to capture more information about a product than the industry standards have to offer you. Another reason for customer-specific fields could be the different way in which you record your product features, which

then need to be mapped to ETIM. A well informed consultant could save you a lot of trouble in this case.

After implementation, smart PIM software will enable your own Data Manager to maintain and improve your data. This way, long-lasting consultancy is unnecessary and you will save costs. We therefore recommend you choose software that is hassle-free and communicates fluently with the existing software in your organization.

Be advised that nowadays there are cloud solutions that can be cancelled per month. This ensures you of flexibility. Also keep in mind that an Escrow-certified partner ensures that any business problems of your partner will not impact your data security.



ERP OR PIM?

The origin of standardization can be found in the desire to exchange data electronically. Your strategic choice determines which system will be leading: ERP or PIM. It all depends on how you would like to manage the processes within your company.

Communication

Well-designed PIM systems are able to share their data with other software. This can be your own website builder who works with Drupal or Magento, or your own DTP department which prefers to work with InDesign. Or, maybe you use Navision, M3 or SAP as an ERP system, or need to pass on information to a Revit drawing tool.

SAAS

With a SAAS solution you rent software, including hosting, backup and support. You only pay for the time you use the software and a local installation or expensive hardware is not required.

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About Compano

Over the last 20 years, Compano has been the outstanding specialist in the field of online software for the building and installation industry.

Our customers are manufacturers, wholesalers and installers. Using our online Product Information Management (PIM) system, our customers rapidly improve their product data, thus allowing their customers to make better informed decisions on which products to buy. In addition to PIM software, Compano also offers Master Data Management (MDM) solutions and calculation software. We also manage our own data pool: Artikelbeheer.nl, which functions as a source for our MDM and calculation customers.

Compano is a recognized partner of the Dutch Ketenstandaard (which manages the ETIM standard for building and installation), FESAH and GS1. Compano is also a proven data connector to, among others, Artikelbeheer.nl, Mepcontent, Stabicad, 2BA, Installdata, Dataselect.ch and Arge Neue Medien.

Do you want to know more about what a PIM system can do for you? Please contact us, without any obligation. We will gladly discuss your data management needs.

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