

Product Information Management in B2B eCommerce



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The rise of B2B eCommerce

B2B commerce is (finally) going digital.

Over the past five years, global eCommerce sales [have more than doubled](#). B2B eCommerce has witnessed even faster growth: the global B2B eCommerce market is a whopping [6 times as valuable](#) as its B2C counterpart. This has supercharged a number of trends in online B2B sales that impact customer experience, product information management, and new eCommerce product offerings, including:

Omnichannel growth

Customers are already moving between brick-and-mortar stores, eCommerce websites, social media stores, and mobile apps, expecting that brands understand and tailor their experience to those habits. According to Accenture, [75% of B2B buyers](#) said they would purchase from the same supplier again based on their omnichannel capabilities.

Mobile growth

Mobile web browsing traffic more than doubled between [2015 to 2020](#), is projected to continue to grow in the coming years, and up to 50 percent of B2B search queries come from mobile traffic. As the mobile-dependent “digital generation” enters the workforce, mobile usage per B2B worker is projected to increase from [2 hours to 3 hours](#) a day and will likely continue to rise going forward.

Cloud growth

Just like mobile sales, the market for cloud-based systems has seen widespread growth over the past 5 years in virtually every geographical market. With an average of [700% more spending](#) directed at cloud technologies than the rest of IT, (80 percent of which is driven by small to medium business), we’re already seeing a market predominantly relying on cloud-based data.

The changing buyer profile

The typical B2B customer has morphed into a tech-savvy millennial, expecting content-rich experiences across all touchpoints. Appealing to emotional or impulsive buyers and addressing shopping cart abandonment is important for both B2C and B2B sellers. Both B2C and B2B customers are equally time sensitive, expecting intuitive login and purchase experiences. In fact, B2B buyers often look for the same digital experiences and store features (including mobile experiences) that they encounter as B2C consumers.

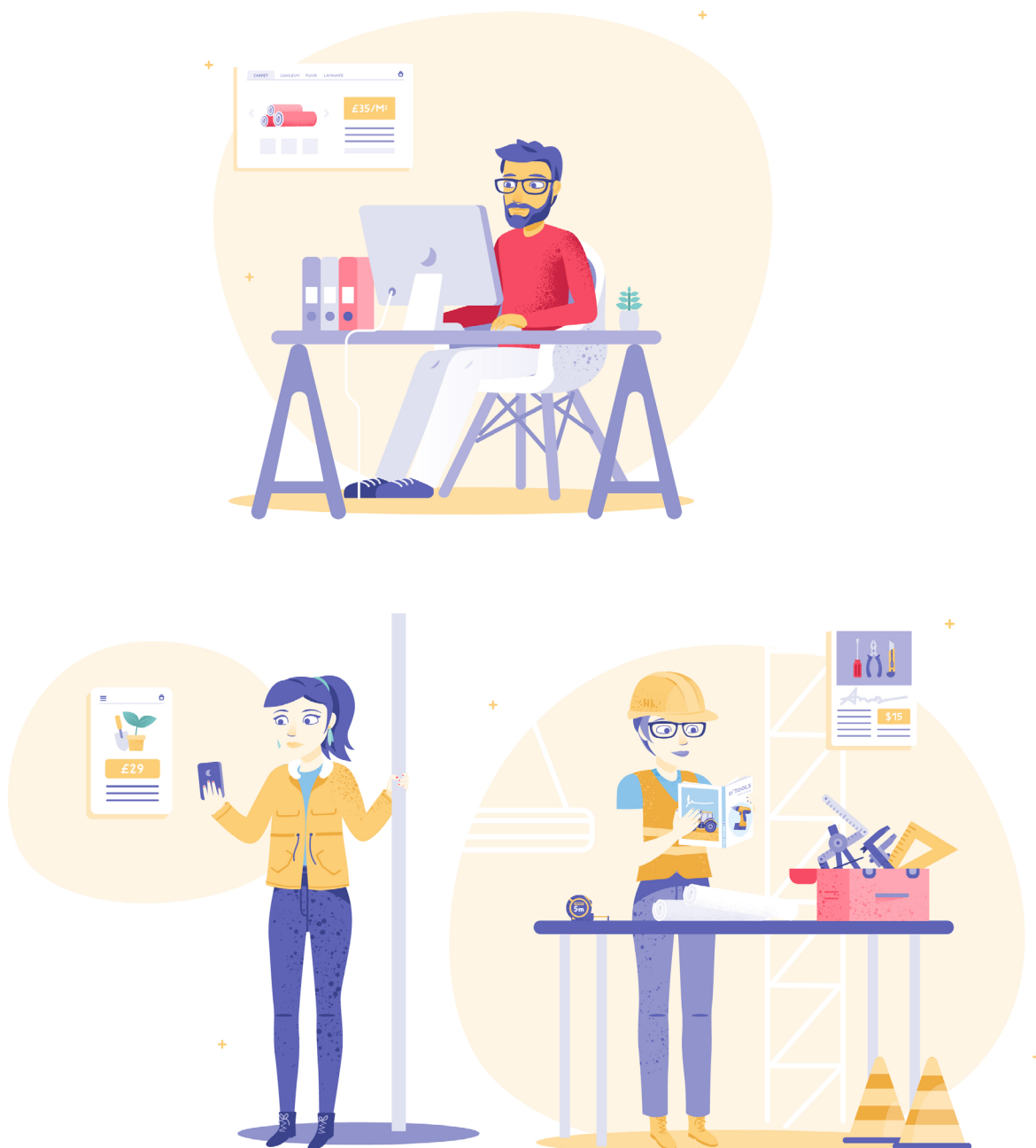
Despite these similarities, the typical B2C and B2B buyer differs in many ways. B2B buyers, for example, rely on many different pieces of content to make a decision, employ multiple people in the decision making process, and rely on email for communication with sellers, all of which translates to longer sales cycles. Business buyers also prefer to use multiple accounts, shopping lists, addresses and checkout processes.

This means that B2B buyers are more receptive to segmented, customer-specific pricing, tailored product specifications, accurate volume-based discounts, real-time inventory and shipping information.

Growing complexity in digital sales channels

As the number of channels sellers must deal with continues to grow, so does the complexity within those channels. Customers expect instantaneous information, and any hiccups in content, its context for the channel, or its delivery has the potential to instantly ruin relationships painstakingly built over time.

With this great opportunity comes new challenges, particularly with respect to collecting, enriching, and distributing product information in a multi-channel or omnichannel context. This is critical, as each channel has its own rules and requirements, meaning product information needs to be defined and configured so that it works within each channel's rules.



B2B eCommerce experience drives the need for PIM

To compete in this rapidly changing environment, B2B businesses must deliver an experience that is rich, relevant, and presented in context for the device and channel a customer is using. Product data also helps interested customers by allowing them to easily find relevant, up-to-date product information they need to make a purchase decision.

This need for exceptional experiences is driving the market for PIM growth — and should continue to drive interest in PIM for the foreseeable future. The [IDC MarketScape: Worldwide PIM Applications for Commerce 2019-2020](#) predicts “the importance of PIM will only grow as organizations seek to forge stronger customer relationships within both the creation and loyalty loops via engaging product stories.”

A strong PIM solution improves both frontend and backend workflows, particularly when combined with other systems such as an ERP and an eCommerce platform. By syncing product data across every area and technology stack, PIMs give back-office staff the ability to use data with the customer in mind. It's also useful in maintaining customer ratings and other customer-generated content that sellers are able to leverage in other areas of their business. This type of information is valuable in strategic decisions, as it improves data syndication, team collaboration, and introduces other benefits that ultimately help accelerate sales.

The growing need for great product data makes a compelling argument for a dedicated solution to manage it, especially as businesses grow their catalogs and add increasingly complex product data to their eCommerce systems. This is driving the market for affordable PIM software that's easy to use and easy to scale. Because PIM solutions can span a complex range of databases, attributes, and relationships, these systems have gotten on the radar of many B2B businesses.



Top 6 reasons you need PIM in B2B eCommerce

Does your B2B business need a PIM? If you're dealing with any of the following situations, the answer is likely yes.

Complex business structures

eCommerce business models tend to evolve over time. As channels continue to proliferate and business structures become more complex, PIM is well positioned to help B2B businesses organize and govern their data to provide consistent, complete, and correct product information to buyers.

Large numbers of products

Whether the goal is to gain market share, satisfy customer demand, or just offer a one-stop-shop for their users, online merchants often choose to carry many different products. B2B storefronts rely on larger orders and can have a much higher SKU count and product inventories in stock. With more room for error within disconnected channels, this puts a strain on data management, transfer, synchronization, and, ultimately, product information integrity. PIM solutions can help ease this strain by automating manual tasks and making it easier for teams to enrich product data.

Complex product data

B2B product catalogs tend to contain different versions, customization options, content types, metadata, and large specification sheets. Data unity across these channels is a must, as one incorrect specification sheet can hold up or prevent a large bulk order. This can result in frustration now and lost business in the future. PIM solutions can help B2B sellers eliminate incorrect and inconsistent data, improve product data quality, and create trust in customer relationships.

Complex buying behaviors

Consumers increasingly move between product and pricing segments, as well as channels. As rigid boundaries between customer segments are blurred, shoppers expect heightened relevance and recommendations based on their buying behaviors and product data points collected by B2B merchants, regardless of the channel they've used previously. PIM solutions can help ensure that you provide a unified, but not necessarily uniform, experience across multiple channels.

Experience expectations

Customers have little patience for product data errors on websites, specifications, catalogs or invoices. In fact, Forrester found that over [87% of shoppers have left a B2B site](#) to perform research around a product because the seller's description or product information was insufficient. A PIM system provides a system of record ensuring product data is accurate and up-to-date across multiple sales channels.

Personalization expectations

For B2B customers, high-quality, personalized content, delivered throughout the buying journey is an important differentiator. In fact, more than [50% of surveyed buyers](#) will choose a supplier due to its personalization. PIM allows B2B businesses to use comprehensive product data to feed data-driven algorithms used to offer personalized recommendations exactly when they're required.

Preparing for the future

As the market continues to evolve, a number of new technologies and continued evolution of buyer behavior will have an impact on B2B eCommerce, for which a robust platform and PIM can help you be ready.

Three emerging trends and technologies include:

VR + AR technology

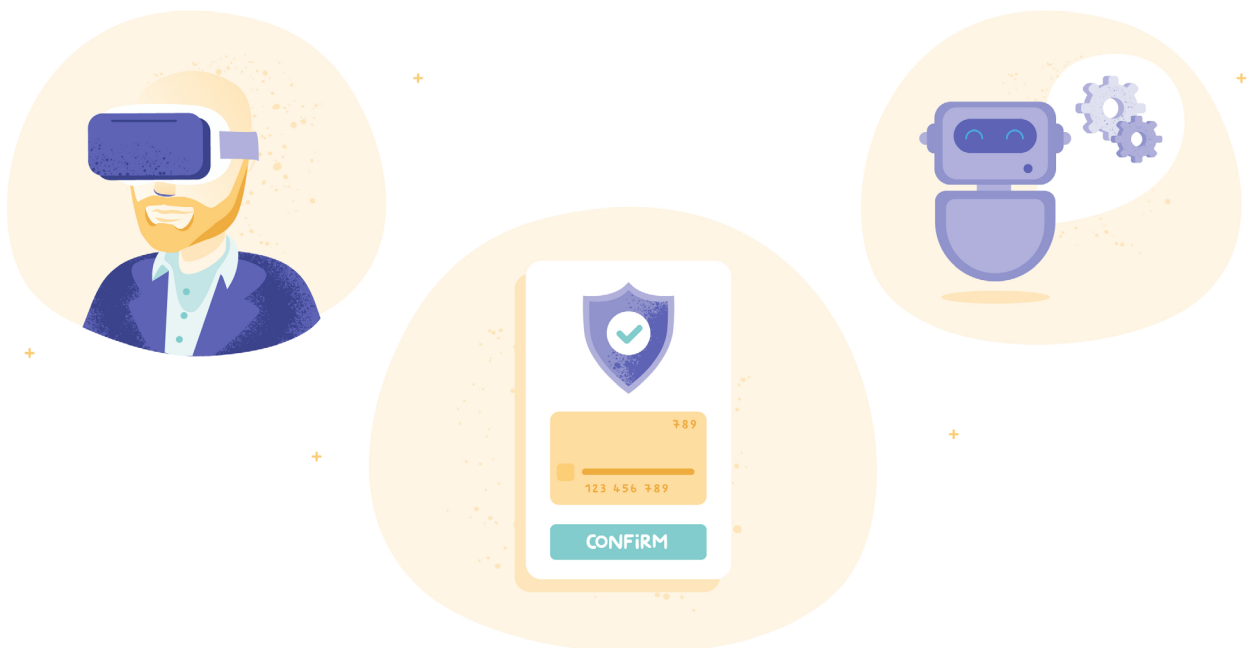
With the help of new technologies such as AI (artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms), VR (experiences enabled by virtual reality glasses), and AR (augmented reality storefronts or apps), analyzing products and utilizing that data to drive business decisions will become more important. Customer demands can change at a moment's notice, and sellers must be able to respond to these changes with the right product data. PIM systems that are able to analyze product information and are flexible enough to handle new types of information from these systems are more likely to deliver business value into the future.

Mobile + customer data

The mobile-centric shopping experience is projected to continue its [upward trend](#), particularly in the areas of mobile payments and loyalty. The reliance on [big data and contextual analytics](#) will also continue to grow as customers' devices generate demographic, location-based, condition-based and predictive data. The amount, range and depth of this data will accelerate demand for PIM systems.

AI + the Internet of Things

AI will help everyone from sales reps to distributors use software to interpret, predict, and automate the best course of action. For eCommerce, this can mean AI-based product recommendations, content personalization, behavior anticipation, and virtual assistants that answer product questions — all of which can be handled via PIM.



Must-Have PIM features and capabilities

Is your business struggling with one of the challenges we described above? Do you think your team would benefit from a PIM? Here are 8 of the most important features we think you should consider when selecting a PIM solution.

Advanced Rights Management

Agility and time-to-market are just as important in the quick-moving omnichannel age, as is the accuracy and consistency of your product information.

Ensure you're establishing and keeping this trust with your buyers with a PIM solution that offers advanced user rights and permissions management capabilities. This is key to providing a secure and controlled environment for governing PIM processes, and for outsourcing parts of your product enrichment or translation processes. These allow your team to fine-tune users, roles, and permissions, allowing them access only the information they need and the field values they are allowed to change.

More importantly, it ensures your team knows exactly whose job it is to update various product descriptions, assets, or other data, leading to fewer errors in product information and a faster time-to-market.

Automation + Business Rules Engine

As the cost of labor increases, so will the use of automation. Customers are already hungry for tools that help optimize data integrity across systems, or eliminate some or all tasks related to logging data, reporting or updating content.

If your team is wasting time on tedious, time-consuming tasks, your PIM solution needs to take this repetitive work off their plate. Strong solutions typically include dedicated features designed to help you improve product data, rather than simply providing a different avenue to enrich product information. The top offerings will also include features designed to automate and eliminate repetitive tasks and streamline processes.

This frees up your team, letting them focus on value-add activities. Find a solution that can do some of the work for you by performing bulk actions and tracking completeness before publishing and validating product content.

Adaptability

It's not enough that your product information be accurate and consistent — you also need to be agile enough to keep up with the quickly changing ways commerce is conducted.

That means your PIM needs to be both able to support your current processes and current sales channel requirements, and easily adapt to future processes and channel demands. The best solutions conform to the way you do things, rather than force you to change your processes and workflows to suit its needs.

Make sure your PIM can adapt to a changing environment before you make your investment.

Flexibility + Ease of Use

A PIM is a business application that you and your team, along with outside users, must adopt and use every day.

That's why you should ensure that your solution offers an intuitive interface and doesn't require your team to sit through hours of training. It should also provide a clear path to managing and enriching products and give a clear overview of the entire product catalog's status, ensuring that your team won't feel they need to use a separate product management tool for data enhancement.

Your PIM should also play nicely with your existing technical stack, because PIM systems are not one-off projects – they are constantly growing and evolving to support more connected systems and technologies.

Digital Asset Management Capabilities

Creating compelling omnichannel customer experiences starts and ends with digital assets.

So, make sure that you pick out a PIM with strong digital asset management capabilities. Ideally, that means a solution that offers both robust digital asset management capabilities so your teams can enrich and transform product assets easily and efficiently, in context for different channels, and strong connectivity to your existing Digital Asset Management system (DAM). Your PIM should also give you a clear preview of any images, videos, PDFs, or other assets before you display them on your channels.

Finally, find a PIM offering that provides a unified library for digital assets. That way, you have a system of record to help manage product assets, regardless of their storage or type, accelerating time-to-market and ensuring accuracy.

Product Data Intelligence Capabilities

Improving product data quality is the key to creating better and more compelling omnichannel experiences. Customers who feel confident that a company is providing them with accurate, consistent information are far more likely to make repeat purchases or recommend the company to others.

Build better relationships with your customers by choosing a PIM that ensures you're providing only the best and most reliable product data. Strong solutions will offer features that both help you identify and integrate high-quality, accurate product information from sources around the web, make it easy for you to quickly measure just how good your existing product information really is, and suggest improvements that can make your product data better than ever before.

A strong PIM solution will function as more than just a container for product information. It should also deliver high-quality data directly to your enrichment team.

Reference Entities

Delivering a great product experience can, and should, include relevant non-product content that can serve to further inform and educate customers, and help you build trust among buyers.

Your PIM should come equipped with features designed to help you organize your product catalog around pieces of common information shared among products, including brands, designers, materials, colors, and more. You should also be able link enriched information to your product, including ingredients, materials, and care instructions for a faster, easier enrichment process.

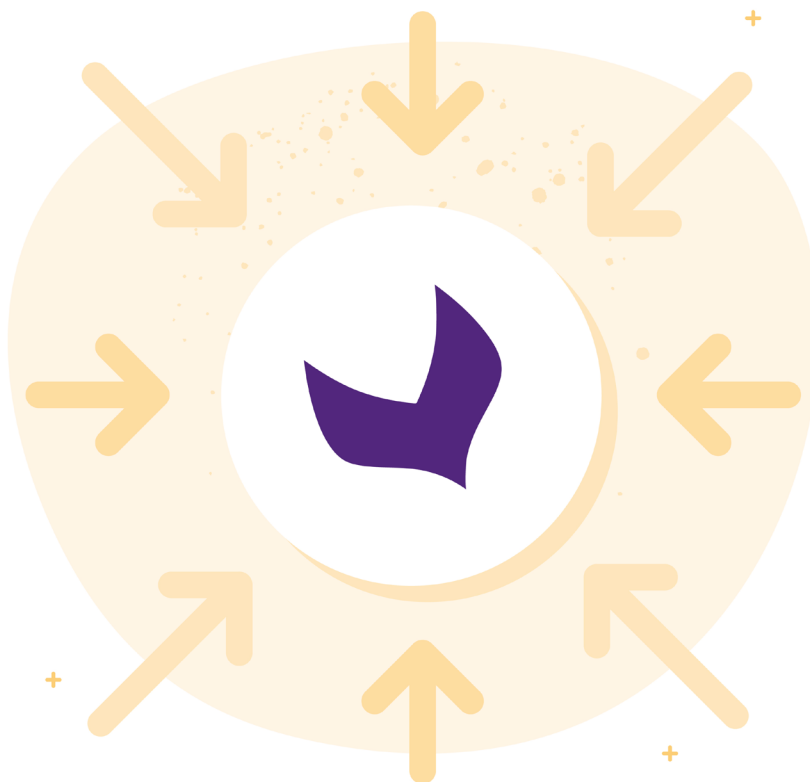
Your team can then use this data to easily and efficiently link information to relevant products in your PIM system to create content-rich product pages. You'll also be able to deliver deeper experiences to customers by providing richer product information while also reducing time-to-market.

Versioning and Publication

Once you've used your PIM's various enrichment features to populate your channels with high-quality, consistent, and complete information, your solution will need to have strong versioning and publication features to help you distribute it to your various touchpoints.

Ensure your PIM is able to allow marketers to spread enriched, complete product information to all channels and all users with the snap of a finger, while also making sure they only export the data they need and route it only to the desired channel and locale. Your solution should also provide connectors capable of hooking into virtually any channel, allowing users to efficiently store product information across a wide range of channels. Look for a solution that allows you to filter or export data based on several products, as well as attributes, families, categories, and identifiers, plus save these profiles for future usage.

The right PIM should also let you restore previous versions of a particular product in one click and maintain multiple versions of your data at the same time. This is especially helpful for staging specialty catalogs.



A modern PIM and B2B eCommerce platform synergy success story

Petra taps OroCommerce to enhance B2B UX

To better understand how a dedicated eCommerce platform and PIM solution can help transform your B2B business, let's take a look at a success story: Petra Industries. Founded in 1985 and initially operating from a small garage, Petra has spent the years since growing into a massive distributor, offering products from more than 60 categories.

After more than two decades in the industry, the company looked to implement a solid foundation that could give them the freedom to grow and utilize all the benefits of digitalization. When Petra came across Oro, Inc., they quickly realized that every B2B feature they were looking for was available with OroCommerce out of the box. That's when the decision was made to overhaul their 9-year old legacy system with the Oro suite of products.

Petra unified their B2B eCommerce operations, implemented OroCRM for a 360-degree view of the customer, and replaced their original store-wide search with Oro's built-in, more robust elastic search engine. Furthermore, they were able to implement:

- Account registration with multiple permission levels and credit approval
- Complex, multi-level website menus, products sorting, and trees
- Long product descriptions, specifications, and downloadable files
- Quick order forms, numerous shopping lists, and shopping carts
- Personalized workflows for customer registration and order approval
- Custom access controls and various staff roles within the company

After an 8-month implementation period, Petra went live with a modern, scalable B2B eCommerce platform, website, and CRM system that addressed their every requirement.

"Oro has an extensive suite of APIs that we use quite a bit to integrate with virtually any B2B application and management system out there," Josh Williams, the company's director of digital and eCommerce marketing said, "which was an important criteria for building an eCommerce operation that stands the test of time."

We have worked closely with Oro to develop a platform that gives our customers a modern and efficient purchasing experience.

Why Petra picked Akeneo to revolutionize its product experience

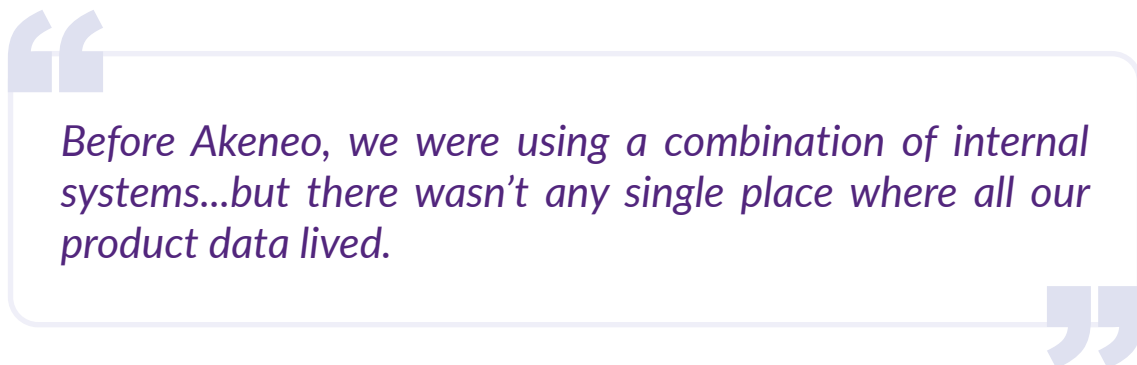
Petra's transformation didn't stop at eCommerce or CRM improvements. They knew that if they wanted to continue their growth trajectory, the quality of product information had to be improved.

For more than three decades, the company had survived without a dedicated solution for enriching and managing product information. As a result, the company lacked a system of record for accurate, consistent product information, leading to struggles with slow-time-to-market and inaccurate product data, according to Josh Williams.

This was a particular challenge when it came to onboarding products. Williams noted that before adopting Akeneo PIM, it could take weeks to onboard complete information on new SKUs from suppliers into Petra's databases. What's more, it took even more time to organize that information and prepare it for sharing with retailers, further slowing the company's turnaround times.

"One of the biggest challenges we were trying to solve centered around onboarding products and enriching products," Williams explained. "We had product data spread out in multiple locations so it was really crucial to centralize all that into a single source of truth, so that everyone in the company had access to all of the same information."

After more than thirty years in the business, Petra decided to implement PIM in hopes of continuing its history of growth into the digital age.



Before Akeneo, we were using a combination of internal systems...but there wasn't any single place where all our product data lived.

Open-source and ease-of-use help Akeneo stand apart

After reviewing several solutions, Petra eventually elected to go with Akeneo. Williams noted that Akeneo PIM's user-friendly interface, open-source nature and more affordable cost set the solution apart from many others in the space.

"We had looked at quite a few PIM solutions over the course of five years...but most just weren't going to be cost-effective for us," Williams explained. "Then we found Akeneo, which worked well for us and was open-source."

Thanks in large part to Akeneo PIM's intuitive user interface, more than 20 regular users across three different departments were trained quickly. Within a matter of days, all of them were up to speed and using Akeneo PIM to enrich and manage more than 33,000 products from 600-plus suppliers.

Business benefits

System of record for product information

Before implementing Akeneo PIM, Petra's product information was stuck in silos, which led to errors in product information and a slow time-to-market. Now, with the addition of a system of record product information, the company is accelerating time-to-market while cutting down on errors and inconsistencies.

Easier ecommerce platform migration

Having a robust PIM solution like Akeneo allowed Petra to easily complete its recent re-platforming to OroCommerce. "Going through an eCommerce replatforming is a huge challenge," Williams said. "Being able to have a connector in place, and have our categorization set in Akeneo was a big time saver."

More sales

The biggest impact Akeneo PIM had on Petra? Increased sales revenue. By providing a single source of truth for accurate, consistent product information, Akeneo helped Petra move more quickly in their market and provide a better customer experience for B2B buyers.

We're light years ahead of where we'd be without Akeneo.



About Akeneo and OroCommerce



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 Midland Scientific, Air Liquide, 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 OroCommerce

OroCommerce, a pioneering B2B-focused e-Commerce platform, is the most flexible B2B eCommerce platform in the market built for mid-market and enterprise companies. With B2B eCommerce features built ready to go, projects are simplified resulting in fewer development hours and faster completion timeframes. As a B2B company, you get a B2B-specific solution that lowers your total cost of ownership and offers a faster return on investment. OroCommerce also offers robust API coverage, an expansive extensions marketplace, and a customization-ready platform to ensure our platform grows with your business.

Through many years of experience in eCommerce and **CRM**, the Oro team is committed to delivering innovative solutions for companies embarking on a digital transformation journey.



For additional information, please visit www.akeneo.com.