

DAM and PIM: A Match Made in MarTech

Managing product data that's aligned with corresponding imagery, video, and other marketing material is a big challenge for many modern businesses. Regardless of the product you sell – be it tangible, like a kitchen appliance, or less concrete, like tourism – pictures, video, and accurate data tied together in targeted customer communications is an anchor for success.

In second-generation digital asset management (DAM), particularly for large retailers, manufacturers, and consumer product companies, marrying authoritative product data with digital assets as they move through the lifecycle towards distribution is an ongoing challenge.

All along the product ecosystem, digital assets need to be findable and marketable based on detailed product data and enhanced marketing content. This becomes particularly important as e-retailers such as Amazon become near-omnipotent. Accurate syndication of product packages, containing timely (likely seasonal) digital assets, accurate product data, and targeted marketing messaging is the lynchpin for successful sales growth.

The Importance of Accurate Product Data

Most products go through a long cycle of ideation and development. There are many platforms for germinating and collaborating around these ideas, and eventually, information will often end up in a PLM, or product lifecycle management tool. It's important to note that these tools usually contain many versions of the product data, in addition to the final one.

The software will sometimes also seek to automate the management of evolving product data and provide an API for integrating that data with other systems.

Several factors are considered during this early stage of the lifecycle: regulatory and localization requirements in particular. How will the product vary based on local regulations and language? How will the packaging change, or will even the product itself be different based on the geography? PLMs can store and manage rules about different markets and re-apply those rules to new products. The goal is to come to a set of final and accurate product data that can be used at global and local levels.

An Introduction to PIM

Product Information Management technology, or PIM, is often the next place product information will end up – once it's ready for market. This is a key difference between PLM and PIM. While PLM manages lifecycles, PIM technology focuses on managing and syndicating the product data that is ready to go to market.



There are many sorts of PIMs with varying degrees of functionality and some DAM systems actually have PIM functionality built in. But the differences include the nature of the content PIMs vs. DAMs manage:

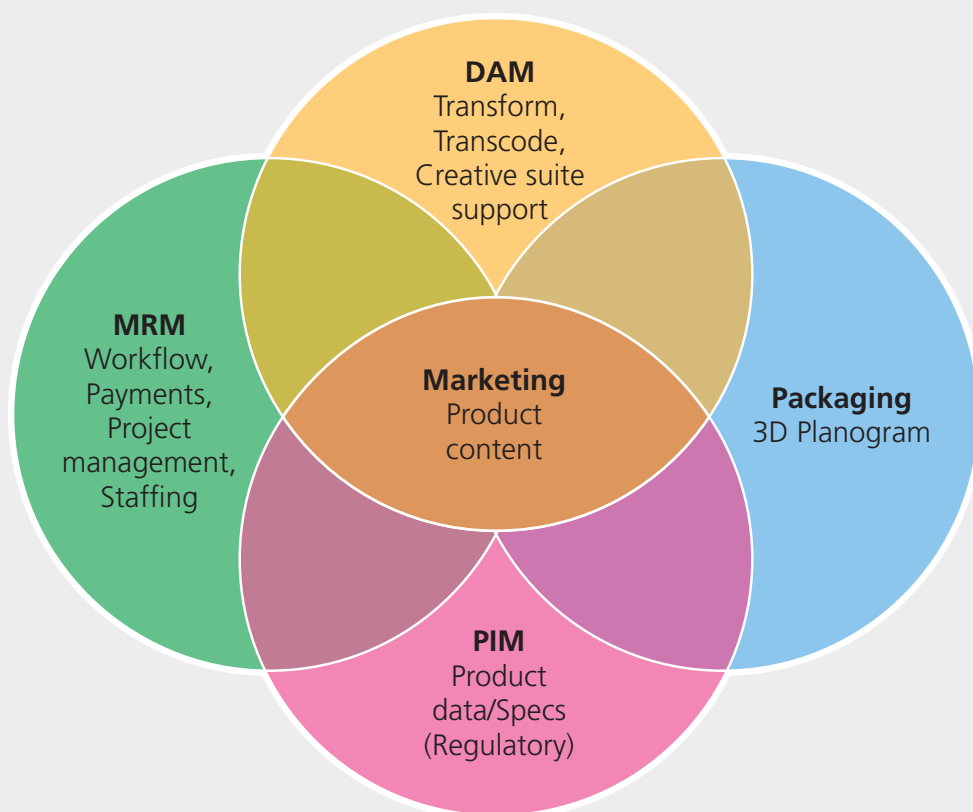
- 1) Product specifications, such as package and product dimensions, and technical details (i.e., digital camera with 16x zoom), versus
- 2) Marketing content, which usually gets introduced at this stage: the 'romantic' copy written by marketers and agencies used to sell a product (i.e. "this camera will empower you to capture amazing moments from a distance, thanks to its powerful 16x zoom").

PIMs tend to manage the data types outlined in number 1, whereas DAMs often manage those in number 2. Frankly, there's a lot of confusion as to what data and content should go into which system, and then how to syndicate it to your own campaign tool, e-commerce system, or the Amazons of the world. Well, the answer is: there's no one right answer. BUT you do have to make a decision and be consistent about it.

Product Content As a Service

In the early days of syndicating product data and images to online retailers, marketers were often cutting-and-pasting from various databases and documents to create a spreadsheet and then sending the materials via email or uploading to the retailer's product content supplier portal. Sadly, many of the product companies I work with still do things this way! The modern approach is to have product data, images, and marketing content available as a packaged service, so content can be syndicated or accessed consistently by the retailers or other partners who need it.

Some PIM systems now offer ways to templatzize the syndication process by retailer, or even by internal division or department. So you may have a different set of product content and images that you're providing to your own internal e-commerce system, your email marketing tool, Amazon, Wal-Mart in the US, Tesco in the UK, and Migros in Switzerland - your PIM can keep that consistent for you via a set of templatzized business rules.



Product content as a service is facilitated by unifying content from various sources and making it accessible to both people and downstream systems. Marketing product content, made available in a centralized interface or data service, enables agencies, retailers, and other internal systems, such as e-commerce, to access the most accurate and up-to-date content, as well as the status of future products and campaigns.



The PIM could store a template for each retailer and aggregate the content required from the PLM, DAM, or other systems. The consistent, template-driven content then gets pushed or pulled as appropriate.

However, there are also enterprise-grade DAM systems with a PIM module, like censhare, that can be configured to achieve similar workflow and syndication tasks. Take the example of Migros, the largest retailer in Switzerland, which also sources and creates a wide variety of their own products.

Migros' requirements included a fully automated product content system with workflows in the background. They needed to be able to create an asset-centric network, sharing content with different departments and agencies to ensure that ads were uniform.

Migros used DAM and PIM technology in concert to:

- Automate steps in the product content operational sequence.
- Confirm that the relevant data is available for each campaign.
- Publish accurate content in regional and store-specific advertisements.
- Aggregate and manage product information, including over 600,000 images.

This example epitomizes “product data as a service” – supplying product data both internally, regionally, and externally.

The screenshot displays the censhare PIM interface for the product 'Cube Tonopah SL Men'. The interface is organized into several sections:

- Left Sidebar:** Contains navigation links for 'My pages' (Dashboard, Tasks, Favorites, Pinboard, Editing, Last created, Last edited, Stored searches, Trash) and 'Open' (Cube Tonopah SL Men, Tonopah). A 'History' section is also present.
- Product Overview:** Features a large image of the 'Tonopah SL Black Anodized' bicycle, its price (€998.00), and a brief description: 'No road is too long, no mountain too steep. Further, faster, lighter... you only get that with our Tonopah SL. It's the benchmark for a very light and exclusive bike, kitted out with only the finest high-end components. We've fine-tuned this bike's weight a lot without sacrificing comfort or ergonomics, as the Shimano XT groupset and premium DT Swiss wheels demonstrate. An air suspension fork and Syntace components speak for themselves: the Tonopah SL is an extremely capable bike in a class of its own.'
- Product Features:** Lists dimensions (190.0 x 110.0 x 94.0 cm), article number/EAN (12345678), and technology (Aluminium Superlite, Advanced Mechanical Forming, Easy Mount Kickstand, Efficient Comfort Geometry).
- Price:** Shows offer price (€899) and retail price (€998).
- Brands:** Lists 'Cube' as the brand.
- Product families:** Lists 'Cube Tonopah' as the product family.
- Product items:** Lists various sizes (46, 50, 54, 58, 62) and their corresponding product items.
- Parts:** Lists components like 'Aluminium Superlite Trekking...', 'SR Suntour NXS S RL-R Lite Tap...', 'Syntace Duraflite 7075', and 'Syntace F109'.
- Accessories:** Lists items like 'Cube Comfort Pump', 'Cube Lightning Set Pro 18', and 'RFR Front Basket Klick&Go'.
- Similar to:** Lists related products like 'Cube Cross', 'Cube Delhi EXC Classic', and 'Cube Touring'.
- Manuals:** Lists manuals like 'CUBE EPO Pedelec.pdf'.

This example from censhare shows the presentation of a product digital asset and its associated wide breadth of metadata. Note the component parts, product features, specifications, accessories, manuals, related products, and more are all in a single interface, facilitating product content management.



Broader Advantages: DAM + PIM = Equation for Success

When you can achieve product content as a service by marrying DAM and PIM, there are downstream positive effects as well. Whether you are a product company or a retailer, a tourism agency, or a museum, supplying consistent, accurate, and high-quality content downstream can result in better personalization, advertising, and promotional opportunities.

Some potential results for your organization include:

- 1) Reduced agency costs by having a single point of collaboration for product data and assets that you manage and own internally.
- 2) Faster time to market based on a consistent source for retrieval of content for downstream systems.
- 3) Less manual effort as the product content package is created once and syndicated to many systems and partners in an automated way.

Conclusions

Though the promise of marrying product data and digital assets is evident, it is not easy to integrate PIM and DAM systems. Here are a few best practices:

- 1) Strive for clean data: make sure your product data is complete before you put it in a PIM and share it with partners, retailers, and other internal systems.
- 2) There are inherent advantages to PIMs and DAMs that are already unified in one platform, or come with pre-packaged connectors and retailer-specific templates for syndication. Be sure to test APIs or connectors carefully, particularly if you already have a DAM or a PIM in place.
- 3) Map out your syndication scenarios in advance: your PIM vendor may already have pre-built rules and templates tailored for the types of syndication you need to do.
- 4) Be sure to organize around a central management concept, like a product ID, that can help keep content consistent as it moves through your ecosystem.

The marriage of PIM and DAM is an ongoing task, not a simple one-step effort. Consider it a vital part of your MarTech strategy for the 21st century.

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