

Best Practices for a Successful PIM Implementation

Preparing to reap the business benefits



Perfion




No system is better than the people who use it.

This also applies to a PIM system, which can be just the tool to create an overview and help the company handle everything from small to enormous amounts of complex product information and distribute it effectively over the relevant channels.

In order for the PIM system to become a central part of the business infrastructure and contribute to the bottom line, it is imperative that the implementation phase be successful. It is in implementation that the foundation is laid, and this is also where one of the very core principles is established: PIM system implementation is not an IT project. It is a business project that must be rooted in management.

We will return to this idea in this guide, which goes over good PIM implementation. Among other things, we will delve into such topics as putting together the right team, having the most constructive dialogue with the provider, the most frequent cultural challenges and a number of classic do's and don'ts.

Happy reading!



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Are you ready to make your decision - PIM or not?

As you read this, you are probably in one of these two situations:

1. You are considering whether PIM is relevant to your business and would like to be further assisted in making the right decision; or
2. You know that PIM is the right choice, and you want to be clearer about what requirements the implementation places on you and your organization.

If you belong to the second group, this guide is extremely relevant to you!

But if you belong to the first group, step back and ask yourself these questions: Is PIM really the way you should go? And how do you figure it out, anyway?



Cut down the spreadsheet forest

The reality is the same in one manufacturing or wholesale business after another: The volume of information about products, prices, product specifications and all sorts of other things is growing, and talented employees are struggling to keep track of the details of one spreadsheet after another. The processes are manual and the risk of errors is constant. At the same time, documentation is often under control, technically speaking, but lacking an overview.

At the same time, the company has an ERP system, and this is where the basic problem arises, because when the ERP system handles prices, inventory management, etc., there is a great deal of information that the system cannot, or should not, handle – simply because it is not designed for it.

Let's take an example. Say your company is Good Wine, which imports wines from southern Europe for Danish enthusiasts. Of course, it is relevant for both you and your customers to have access to information on prices and stock status, but when it comes to wine, it is also relevant to be able to access information about the nature of the wine (red, white, sparkling, dessert, etc.), country, grape, alcohol percentage and shelf life. This information is crucial for selling the wine, but it is not in your ERP system. It is seen as irrelevant information from an economic point of view, so you need to have a parallel spreadsheet setup where you keep track of this information.

Another example might be that you receive goods from Asia or from a local subcontractor, and while you record the financial details in your ERP system, you enter the goods' data in the spreadsheet, since you will need it for creating product catalogs or updating your webshop.

Spreadsheets are not a problem per se, and if your business is very small, or if you have only a very limited product range, it may well be that using a PIM system would be overkill. But as the amount of data grows, the complexity increases, and the spreadsheet forest quickly becomes so large that you risk getting lost, thus negatively affecting everything on your bottom line.

In either scenario, the PIM system can be the tool that replaces the spreadsheets and gives you an overview of your data. You will have a common language across data categories and the opportunity to design processes that will give you an overview of product life cycles in your system.

In order for PIM to be successful, a good foundation must be laid. The products must be prepared digitally, and before that you have to go through an analysis phase.

Map data - keep it simple

The first step – which we briefly mentioned in the introduction and to which we will return later – is to have the PIM project anchored in management. In many companies it will be regarded as an IT project, but that is a bad decision. Yes, it involves an IT system, but it is really a business project that has a far more fundamental purpose than just being rolled out. A PIM system changes the way in which you work (and make money), so it is imperative that there be management support and focus. Long before anyone enters anything in the system, some management decisions must be made.

When there is support for the project, you have to start by mapping how data moves in the company. See it as a process description: which suppliers send what and how, data entry processes, etc. Mapping provides an overview of how data flows through the various systems. That overview should be used to assess where and how a PIM system will make sense.

Go work in hands-on mode: use whiteboards, flipovers, sticky notes on the conference table, etc. Forget Excel and Fileshare at first; keep it manual and analog so that everyone involved sees the same thing in the same place. This will allow you to have the relevant talk about data when the mapping shows inaccuracies or unexpected opportunities.

Then you can describe a specific product. In Good Wine, for example, it could be an Italian red wine, where there are a lot of parameters involved.

You have a price – where should it appear? It should appear on the website and in the product catalogs, and it must be accessible for use in ads on social media, but it “lives” in the ERP system.

Then there is the stock status – that is ERP data.

The alcohol percentage, on the other hand, is not relevant for ERP. The rule of thumb is that the information that must appear on the invoice is ERP data. It is not relevant in this case, so the alcohol percentage is PIM data.

Let's now return to the price. As mentioned, it is owned by ERP, but if you are to be able to transfer it to a standard printable data sheet, for example, it must also live in PIM. It also raises some questions with regard to the specific handling – should your store have constant real-time prices?

Of course, there will be many other types of data that are relevant to look into: extra descriptions, images, status fields, web categories, etc. Make sure to get all of your ideas on the table so you have the full overview.

Assemble the right team

From the outset, this should be the step before mapping data, but now you know what inputs are needed, which is why it will be easier to define the right roles for your team. Keep in mind that what you need is deep knowledge of the company's processes.

So start with Marketing. Typically, employees in this department rely on the ability to quickly validate and edit product information in different systems. In addition, relevant personnel will often be product managers, warehouse managers, finance managers and of course people “on the floor”, such as accounting staff who are involved in the processes every single day and who depend on being able to navigate the systems efficiently.

The IT department is a case in itself. Getting the IT manager on board is crucial because that person will be extremely important. However, it is important that the goal be kept in mind: namely, to optimize business for the benefit of all. A PIM project – from the IT manager's point of view – can very quickly be perceived as an IT project, but it is not. PIM is a business project, and it is our experience that if it is positioned like this from the beginning of the process and the IT department thus gets a less dominant support function in it, one can avoid the PIM project getting bogged down among other large IT projects that are underway.

In reality, a PIM system will most often be a gift to the IT manager, who will have a simplified IT infrastructure where a number of decentralized systems that have been used to store product data can be eliminated or at least freed up. These might include Excel, a CMS system, or even ERP.

The simplified structure will typically result in a positive change in scalability in the business, which would be difficult to manage with fragmented systems.

Summary - You should:

- involve employees with hands-on experience in processes;
- involve employees from all relevant departments;
- remember that it is a business project, not an IT project;
- respect, but do not let yourself be dictated to by the IT department.



Internally - prepare for a cultural change

Implementation of a PIM system will give a lot of advantages to many companies in the form of greater overview, better scaling possibilities and eventually huge time savings. But as with everything that breaks habits, the rule is: it is new and the new is often something “dangerous”. Or at very least it is unfamiliar, because with PIM, when the new is no longer new it is something that offers a wide range of business-critical benefits, not least time savings.

Or as we usually say in the PIM world, it takes a short time to install PIM, but the work never really stops. PIM is an integral part of the business and, as the business evolves with new products and more channels, the PIM system must follow. Therefore, a PIM solution never stands still, but is constantly evolving.

A PIM system requires that the preparatory work be thorough, that the right people be involved and that data discipline remain at a high level.

So there is a task of creating the right culture with regard to the PIM project. Be prepared to explain the benefits PIM will provide, and be open to the inevitably resulting workflow changes. Nonetheless, these are changes that will generate benefits for people in every corner of the organization.

One very specific workflow that will undergo significant optimizing is the catalog production process. In some companies, catalog production requires many man-years because there is so much information that needs to be found, updated, categorized, imported and checked, and it is absolutely essential that images, prices, specifications, etc. be correct. In companies with PIM, the process is markedly different and far less demanding, because the system knows the relevant information. Thus, there are plenty of manual processes that can be completely eliminated and the risk of error is significantly reduced.

Externally – set strict requirements for your PIM provider

It's no secret that Perfion sells PIM solutions – that's how we make our living. That is also why the arrow points to us when we tell you that you should make high demands of your PIM provider.

Be careful with sellers who promise you one feature after another. We are not talking about a robotic lawnmower or a smart TV that has so-and-so many gears or voice controls and is prepared for virtual reality.

We are talking about investing in a business-critical system that will strengthen your business, and here the process is frankly more important than the number of buttons you can turn on. Of course, this assumes that you trust the product to do what it should, but you have no doubt when you meet the serious players in the market.

Remember to get references on any suppliers. It may be a good idea to confer with people you know and trust, but it can also be an idea to reach out to companies similar to yours, so you can pressure test just the aspects that make your industry special in relation to a PIM project



Consider how easily the PIM solution can be implemented and – not least – upgraded independently of your other IT systems, and whether you can easily make changes to the system even without being a programmer. You should have the ability to integrate with new channels in the future and not be locked-in by the current components and modules.

Also, be critical when it comes to the consulting – both preceding your PIM system purchase and installation and in the follow-up. Please inquire. And please ask again.

Seven classic PIM implementation do's and don'ts

There are a number of barriers a company typically encounters when implementing a PIM system. And there is a long list of do's and don'ts that are pretty much always relevant to consider.

Here are the seven classic do's and don'ts:

- 1.** Map data and create a complete overview of the necessary technical integrations (between ERP and PIM, for example).
- 2.** Establish a good culture between business and IT – everyone is on the same team and everyone has to pull in the same direction.
- 3.** Get management to take ownership of the project – strong management anchoring is a must.
- 4.** It is important to remember the most important factor of all: things take time. This also applies to PIM integration, so defuse the predictable frustration of making a realistic schedule.
- 5.** Valuable things cost money. So does a good PIM system, so look at the potential and view the project as an investment and not an expense.
- 6.** Keep the project as simple as possible. Do not build a rocketship when you can settle for a solid station wagon that can do the job, get good mileage and does not require expensive repairs.
- 7.** Go for a step-by-step implementation – start small and enhance the system over time. By all means, do not insist on developing an ironclad solution while constantly postponing the launch date. Use your energy in the preparation phase of data mapping, and then go with the simplest possible solution that adds value to the business so you start to reap both value and knowledge.

All-in-one? Remember to think ahead

A PIM implementation may sound like an extensive task, but as we hopefully impressed upon you in this guide, it basically just requires a structured process and a supplier who can provide input for all the necessary or desired phases of the process.

One last point here: Always think about the right solution. The right solution is almost always a best-of-breed approach. Our years of experience tell us that PIM considerations often come on the table when a company is considering replacing the ERP system.

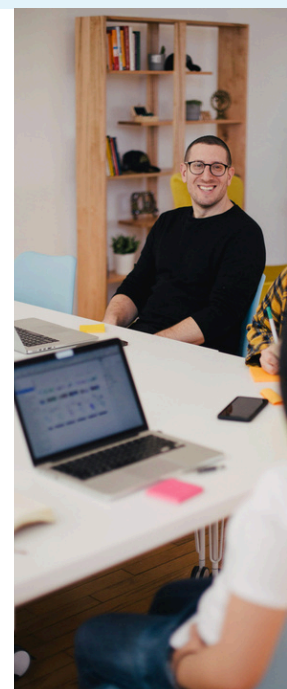
In that situation, an alarm bell should ring if the system you are considering can supposedly “do it all”. If you choose a system with integrated PIM tools, you have to go into just as much detail with that specific corner of the system as you would if you were looking at a best-of-breed PIM system. Maybe the ERP system is what you need, but think of the Good Wine example. If you actually have data that is not ERP data in nature, you are likely to face a challenge – if not now, then later, as your business and thus the amount of data and the need to deliver it to many different channels grow.

Good luck with your PIM system implementation.

Do you need to upgrade to a new ERP system?

Here's a great tip!

When implementing a new ERP system, you are often upgrading from an existing ERP. In the old system, there are usually a lot of custom configurations, including storing ERP-irrelevant product data. Instead of contaminating the new ERP system with the old system configurations, it is advantageous to implement a PIM system first, thereby simplifying its ERP layer before the upgrade.



Perfion – Single Source of Truth

Perfion PIM is developed for companies that communicate through many channels and in several languages and which have a complex product structure with a lot of product data.

As the world's only 100% standardized solution for Product Information Management, Perfion PIM provides you with the basis for optimizing your company's processes which allows you to lower the time-to-market, gain new market share and to always deliver the information that your customers need.

With Perfion, you have one simple source for all your texts, technical data, files, pictures, videos, etc. This gives you full control over all product data on all sales and marketing platforms.

Perfion's open API makes it easy to integrate the solution with the IT systems you are currently using – anything from your ERP system, InDesign and your Office package. Similarly, Perfion has a standard integration into several e-commerce platforms which makes it easy to keep your webshop updated directly from Perfion PIM.





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