



PIM for Beginners

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CATALOGUE
MANAGEMENT IN THE CLOUD FOR E-COMMERCE



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You're still at the foot of the mountain and the summit seems too far away and out of your reach. You know that feeling, right? It's the same every day when it comes to solving your e-commerce content problems. And you heard that a PIM system could help you conquer that 'mountain'...



What is a PIM System?

WHAT IS A PIM SYSTEM?

We could start with the basics: what is the significance of these three high mountains that make up a PIM system? PIM stands for Product Information Management or, in other words, the management of product information: all data regarding your company's product catalogue. But, those three mountains are not always the same, and sometimes they are known as PDM (Product Data Management), PCM (Product Content Management), PRM (Product Resource Management) and MDM (Product Master Data Management). This landscape is too rocky, right?

Let's look at the shadows cast by these mountains of acronyms that don't actually explain anything to us.

Step by Step: PIM System as a tool

Applied to the daily life of a business that decides to jump into e-commerce, a PIM is a software extension that integrates with the online trading platform chosen by a company (the best known and used is Magento, as you would probably know). So, the PIM system isn't really an imposing mountain range, but a multi-channel marketing software tool that allows you to easily climb the e-commerce mountain. Just like a powerful pick that fits into any crack during the ascent, a PIM system has the ability to track all the data in real time which corresponds to a company's catalogues and inventory, by sending it appropriately to all the channels where the information is needed, and ensuring that every channel connects with each other. The whole team can then climb simultaneously without any slowdowns caused by someone not receiving a new order, or misled on to another mountain path.

Because as any e-commerce adventurer well assumes, teamwork is essential. But maintaining synchrony between different people and channels at the same time is exhausting, even for the most responsible and methodical person. There is a lot of pressure put on any climber to be aware of their own rope whilst often stopping to check that they haven't gotten into a tangle with the rest. And, yes, they do entangle, and a lot. And although in the e-commerce business environment the consequences are less deadly than a downhill fall, let's say they can also be very bad for business.

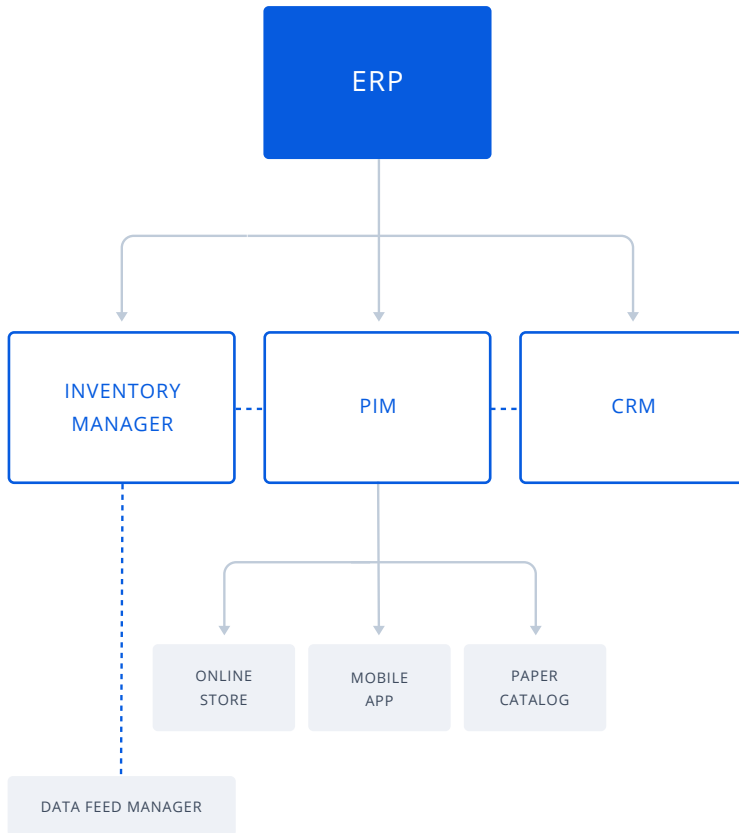
"A multichannel marketing software tool that allows real-time tracking for all data contained in a company's catalogues and inventory, by sending it appropriately to all channels."

The main problem that arises in any business is very similar to the ropes that often get tangled when climbing a mountain. We are referring to the dreaded paperwork which has now almost been totally replaced by folders for digital documents. There are also many of these. Too many of them! Hundreds and hundreds of spreadsheets packed in columns that attempt to organize a torrent of data in a perpetual process of updating. It is either because the sales season has started, the spring season or the Christmas collection has arrived, or it is the redesign launch of that product sold out a while ago. All team members are at the foothill, checking again and again if everything is in order, and the expedition never moves up. In addition, they start to scare the wildlife that inhabits the area, and the purpose of the trip. They can no longer spot eagles and deer as these have left indignantly, just as your customers will run away if your online catalogue looks chaotic.

A PIM system allows you to avoid this situation, because it helps companies and retailers with e-commerce services when it comes to storing and updating all the information concerning the product catalogue through a storage system in the cloud, which facilitates data centralisation and productivity. Just because a PIM system is in the cloud, this does not mean that it is a 'god' for a company; on the contrary: it is more like a guardian angel; a little superhero octopus that manages to place everything that is thrown at it. The essential part here is the cloud storage that makes it easier for information to travel towards the appropriate channels and attract the desired audience.

Imagine being able to climb without ropes, almost being able to fly... It's not magic, of course, but the effects are very similar.

The PIM System inside the company



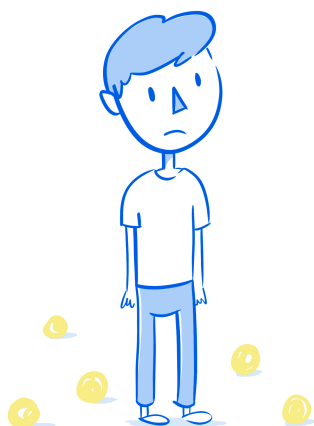
The science behind any PIM System: A Superhero Octopus

From a company's ERP, where data files are stored (usually pages of flat data, Excel sheets are used mostly), and any other sources of product information, including resources of images and videos, a PIM system collects all such material and channels it in the right directions. It is responsible for searching elements; to manage the translation of descriptions; to classify categories; to correct errors; to edit updates and changes; to enrich the product description, and to synchronize their presence in all areas.

"The information, mobile apps, printed catalogues, and the points of sale information are updated and displayed in an organized way on the e-commerce platform."

Of course, artificial intelligence is not so developed yet, and the PIM system is not a robot that works autonomously. It still needs the input from authorised team members, but the PIM system ensures that there are no more conflicts among them when it comes to keeping the product information up to date, but this is another story in the coffee room. In addition, the PIM system provides reports for any updates and a history of the modifications that have been carried out, as well as which team members with access to the service have performed a task and when.

Through PIM, members with access to the system can organize and classify products according to the categories and labels desired, and update any associated data, such as prices, product features or images that will appear equally on all platforms linked to the PIM system. Inconsistencies will never occur again between physical and online catalogues, or between products in the same collection that have different data sheets. This centralisation facilitates the translation of the catalogue content into different languages, or to other international standards (e.g. shoe sizes). Your PIM system will guarantee that the same rigorous information is displayed on all channels, and this data will be equally displayed to all members of the company, and in any country from which a related agency or client can access the online store.

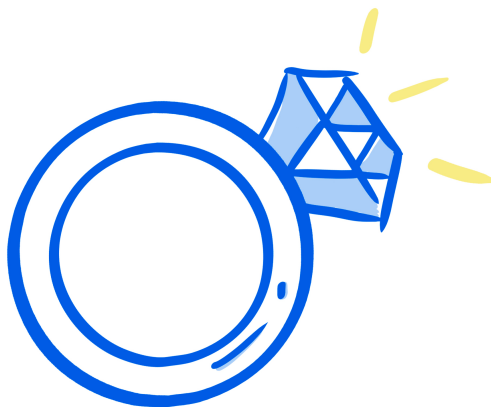


NO PIM



WITH PIM

A PIM system is basically like receiving a tornado, which is then controlled before it is released back into the world through various appropriate channels, all of which will be presented in a consistent way. PIM is the event planner that ensures that the bride will not turn up at church with a less than perfect appearance. And not only the bride - everything has to be in harmony so that the event will not turn into a dog's dinner (people may run away in disgust before they have a chance to give their gifts!). We do not want the godfather to show up wearing Converse trainers, and vegetarian guests should know exactly what their options are on the menu. And, as they say, your wedding day, like the day you expose your online store to the public, is the most important day of your life.



What is a PIM System not?

After analysing the landscape of the PIM system carefully, it seems quite difficult to confuse it with any other place in the world. Unfortunately, this happens very often: just a glance away can make all mountains appear the same, but you are not here because you are a weekender; you are an expert geologist and you know how to tell the difference.

A PIM is not an ERP

So you must know very well that a PIM system is not a company's ERP (the acronym for Enterprise Resource Planning). They say we are what we eat, but while the PIM system feeds from the ERP, it does not swallow it completely. The ERP organizes all the central management of the company and is connected to all other services and processes within the company, including the PIM system. The ERP is the heart of the company; a cold one, but it is a heart after all. The PIM is the force that pumps the information in the right directions and causes the body of your catalogue information to always be ready, instead of stumbling along like a zombie.

A PIM is not an inventory manager

The Inventory Manager is behind the PIM system and is responsible for the warehouse materials, supplies and catalogue funds. The Inventory Manager will send updated information about the stock of products and the status of orders and stores, but the manager's task is purely physical, while, as we have mentioned, the PIM works in the cloud.

A PIM is not a CRM

By looking a little further, we discover that a PIM system is not the CRM (acronym for Customer Relationship Management). This section is responsible for customer management, which is a step that is not among the tasks of a PIM system. Your PIM system will help customers to have a pleasant journey through the catalogue information and it will surely influence their experience and their decision to make a purchase. But the PIM system will never deal with the customer directly, as that is another difficult task that deserves its own service, which is the CRM.

A PIM is not a DFM

Finally, the brother of a PIM system is the Data Feed Manager, which is an extension responsible for disseminating the company's catalogue on various platforms and purchase engines in addition to the maintenance of e-marketing campaigns. PIM provides information for the DFM, which synchronizes the product information, the orders, the sales and the stock in different marketplaces. For example, suppose you are a publisher of children's books - by using a DFM, you will make sure that your titles are properly displayed on Amazon, Book Depository, Barnes & Noble or Google Shopping.

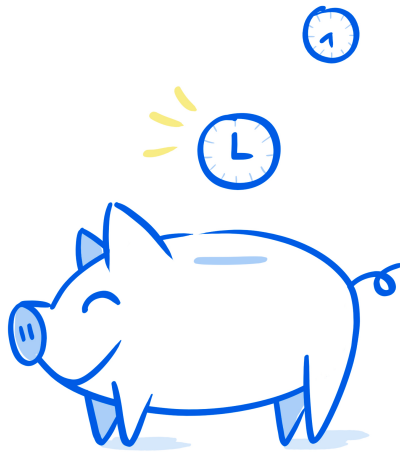
Which problems can a PIM System solve?

The benefits of a PIM system speak for themselves by now. Appropriate info, perfect products, control over published content, team synchronization and confidence that the effort and marketing content are reaching the customer. You will surely be stretching at the foot of the mountain now, and ready to set out on the great adventure with a tool that conveys such confidence. But we know that everyone is not as brave as each other, and even less so in front of large risks. That is totally understandable, and there is nothing to be embarrassed about, so let's take a few more comforting steps, one by one.

“In very general terms, a PIM system will save you considerable time and energy like any powerful tool.”

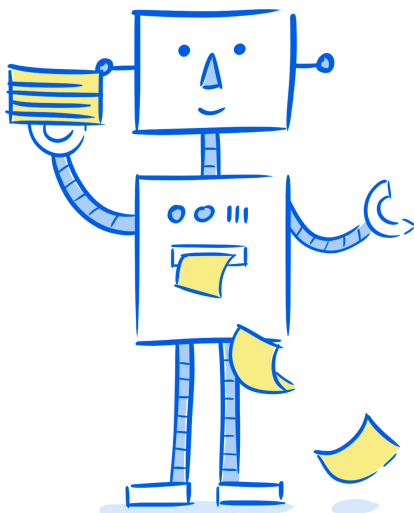
Savings will be made for you to invest in other more important tasks - there is no reason not to spend them, so don't be mean! We have already checked that a PIM system avoids repetitive tasks, speeds up the flow of information through e-commerce, and that comparative tables can immediately check what omissions are produced in product descriptions, so that you can manage these gaps instantly, without having to track chaotic documents, from computer to computer, and from employee to employee.

This is another question to ponder on, and to see if the echo from the mountain comes back to us with more problems solved. What else does a



- The centralisation of a database with multiple documents that make it difficult to query and update information, and easily causes omissions, errors and mismatches between the descriptions of different product categories, both in physical and online catalogues, and in mobile apps.
- An effective SEO that solves the absence of keywords associated to each description and product, which makes their location via public search engines more difficult.
- A more attractive brand image against the competition.
- A good impression generated for online customers instead of that chaotic feeling conveyed by a poorly developed catalogue - something that often causes leaving the shopping cart due to a lack of data and checkout security.

- Improved conversion rate and a lower rate of attrition for the website which means more users complete purchases, and avoids the loss of potential customers and visitors.
 - Consistency among images, videos and product descriptions in the various channels used by the company.
 - Automatic product updates for potential buyers to see which improves the shopping experience for customers, particularly when it comes to launches and renewals for different seasons or collections.
- Access to all the information through a single location.
- Validated content before it is released into public channels.



What tasks does a PIM System include?

In general terms, it seems that the PIM system solves many issues and has a positive effect, but this is like glancing at a TV advert for a fantastic food processor. What you really need, if possible, is to attend a live demonstration and see it working for you, (any good PIM system will offer a trial period, so make no mistake).

Now we will open the tools of the Swiss Army knife in front of you, so that you know what you can resort to during the climb without losing time by asking yourself which functions are included. This is everything that the energy of a PIM system is capable of:

- To centralise product content in one place.
- To automate the publication of content in e-commerce.
- To automate the creation of paper catalogues.
- To create automatic PDF technical data sheets.
- To share product data between supplier and customer.
- To analyse the quality of content.
- To customise the content according to the variable needs and expectations of customers.
- To manage marketing data (descriptions, tags, media assets).
- To coordinate basic product data: name, category, technical characteristics, description...

- To coordinate attributive data: cost, price, SKU or reference numbers...
- To coordinate technical data: warranty, packaging, dimensions...
- To provide quality photographs that illustrate each product.
- To manage content translation into several languages.
- To organise specific information offline: physical catalogues, POS terminals...
- To contribute additional SEO information: Google categories.
- To allow a collaboration shared between team members and relevant external parties.
- To incorporate the information provided by other product content services such as GS1, Icecat, CNET, and SKUvantage...
- To provide information to the services mentioned above.

Do you really need a PIM System?

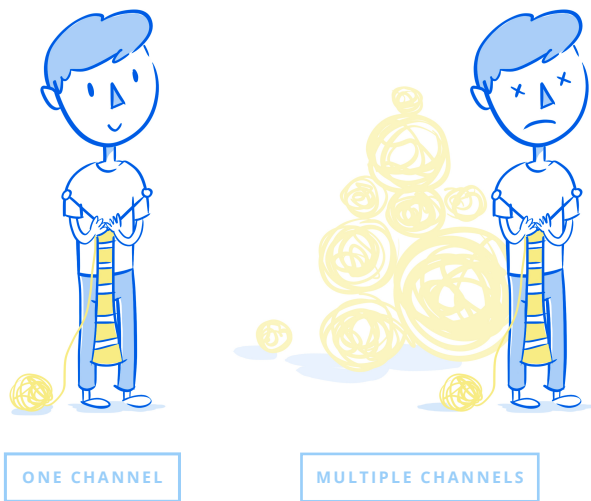
At this point, nobody wants you to start hesitating half way up the mountain, after discovering you suffer from vertigo. Neither do you want to unwrap the fancy food processor before you suddenly become aware that you actually prefer to eat in restaurants. Let's face it, a PIM system is not for everyone, and not all e-commerce businesses need one.

"It is not a question of suitability – it is simply the nature of your business and the stage it is at, which will require some tools before others."

A PIM system becomes essential as a business grows and starts to develop some aspects and sales of a considerable volume that small teams would find it hard to cope with. Large retailers, distributors, manufacturers and companies that handle a large number of channels and documents with information on product updates will not think twice about hiring a PIM system. The bigger your catalogue, the more you will be exposed to errors, repetitions and inconsistencies between sections of the team that continuously perform catalogue updates.

A PIM system may be unnecessary for small shops that don't offer many collections and only use one channel (e.g. an online shop without a mobile app or physical store), at least until they acquire a bigger volume and a structure that makes data centralisation more complex.

Imagine a ball of wool in your hands. Now, pull a string from the ball and start knitting a simple scarf, perhaps like the ones you saw your grandmother (or hipster friend) make. Two needles and an easy pattern to follow will be enough. But what if you want to weave an intricate tapestry? What if you need many more strings and the ball grows and grows and



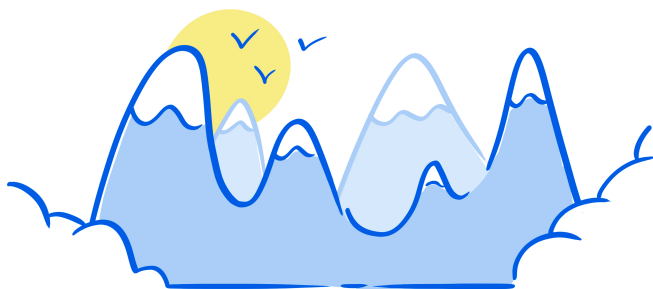
DO YOU REALLY NEED A PIM SYSTEM?

The PIM system does not only affect the quantity, as it also affects the quality: it is the solution to a disorganized scenario, composed of poor or out-dated content regarding structure and descriptions, which may have gaps, omissions and contradictions between different platforms. It seems like an internal problem, because it reflects whether there are communication failures between various team members responsible for updating different databases. It is something that is slowing down tasks and distracting other more important decisions in the process.

But in the moment of truth, everything has an impact on the exterior: customer traffic and sales figures. Perhaps only on numbers, or also on complaints and inquiries sent by some customers, who may feel that the shop information is unreliable. And we already know that it takes a lot of confidence to climb any mountain, and that e-commerce, should feel like a smooth sleigh ride for your customers.

What PIM System services are in the market?

We must confess a little lie. It was actually just a little white lie. We said that a PIM system is one mountain, when in fact there are many PIM mountains. We won't say that this is a bad thing, because we know tyrannies are terrible, and because a single PIM system supplier could never cope with all the companies in the world, just as one mountain

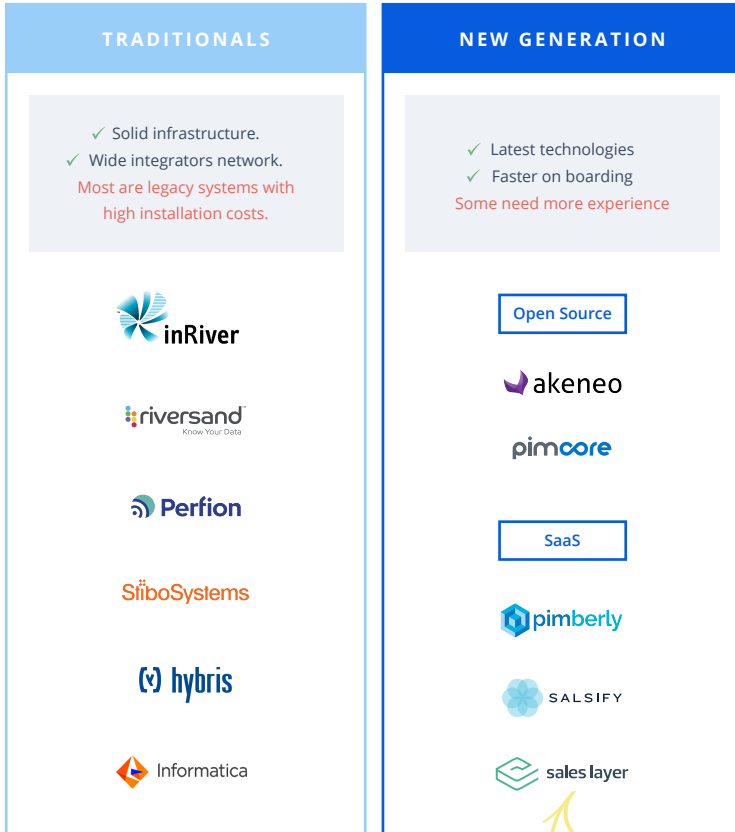


Although all PIM systems cover similar needs in essence, attention to different details of the process involves different characteristics in each supplier. For example, if you are fairly convinced about the idea of contracting a PIM system for your business, you can start analysing the different suppliers on the market to check features such as these:

- A user-friendly interface.
- Absence of hidden costs.
- A good technical support team.
- Ease of implementation within any e-commerce platform, as it this will reduce costs and problems during the start-up.
- A scalable price and a structure with your company and/or your needs.
- Improved quality of product images.
- Translation and automatic synchronization in several languages.
- Equipment and/or user activity reports.
- Analytical content and effectiveness.
- Different degrees of customisation in the use of the PIM service.
- Services linked to marketing agencies.

As all this means getting very picky on the first date, let's take an aerial look at this and focus on the major categories of PIM that there are out there and that match different needs with some specific examples. This is a very generic analysis that is not intended to be based on a scientific approach, and serves only as a reference.

PIM Types



That's us!

At the end of this trip (or rather right now before we start it), the mountain remains just as it was at the beginning and never changes, but you can be at the top waving your victorious flag, or you can stay down there, undecided and defeated. It is easy to predict where will you prefer to be, but it mostly depends on your strategy when dealing with the intrinsic difficulty of the mountain. To do this, it is best to be equipped with versatile tools which can adapt to any objective, and we have already seen that a PIM system, just like other marketing services, can help you succeed. Do you dare to enrich the experience of your e-commerce with a PIM system?





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