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# Product Information Management in Retail

## // The increasing importance of product information

As the second most visited fashion website in the world, Asos adds around 5,000 new products each week to its website, holding an inventory of 85,000+ products in total. But, there is no duplication, and a 100% consistent standard of information provided to its active customer base of over 15 million shoppers.

With the rise and rise of fast fashion, we are also experiencing the decline of traditional seasonality retailing. As the speed of product introduction increases due to customer demand for newness, and the number of global retail channels continues to grow, the value of trusted product data (or Item Master Data) has taken on increased importance. Recent research has proved that retailers with faster product introduction have experienced much greater performance sales growth.

This whitepaper addresses best practice product information management, with insights into how retailers can benefit from improved PIM functionality.

**Confidence in your products is the cornerstone of profitable, customer-focused retailing. An integrated product information management system, or PIM, enables "one version of the truth" where its inventory is concerned.**



**Asos is one of the retail industry's greatest global success stories, still growing, and on target for £4bn by 2020. So, how do profitable retailers get it right?**

## What is a PIM?

A retailer's Item Master Data, or product information management system (PIM), is the source of initial product data as it enters the supply chain. Before a product is released for sale, retailers create and configure the product, assign a description for its purchase order, define the product properties and attributes, and assign the product to its relevant retail category hierarchies.

**PIM allows complete consistency of product information, in a single unique format visible across the business.**

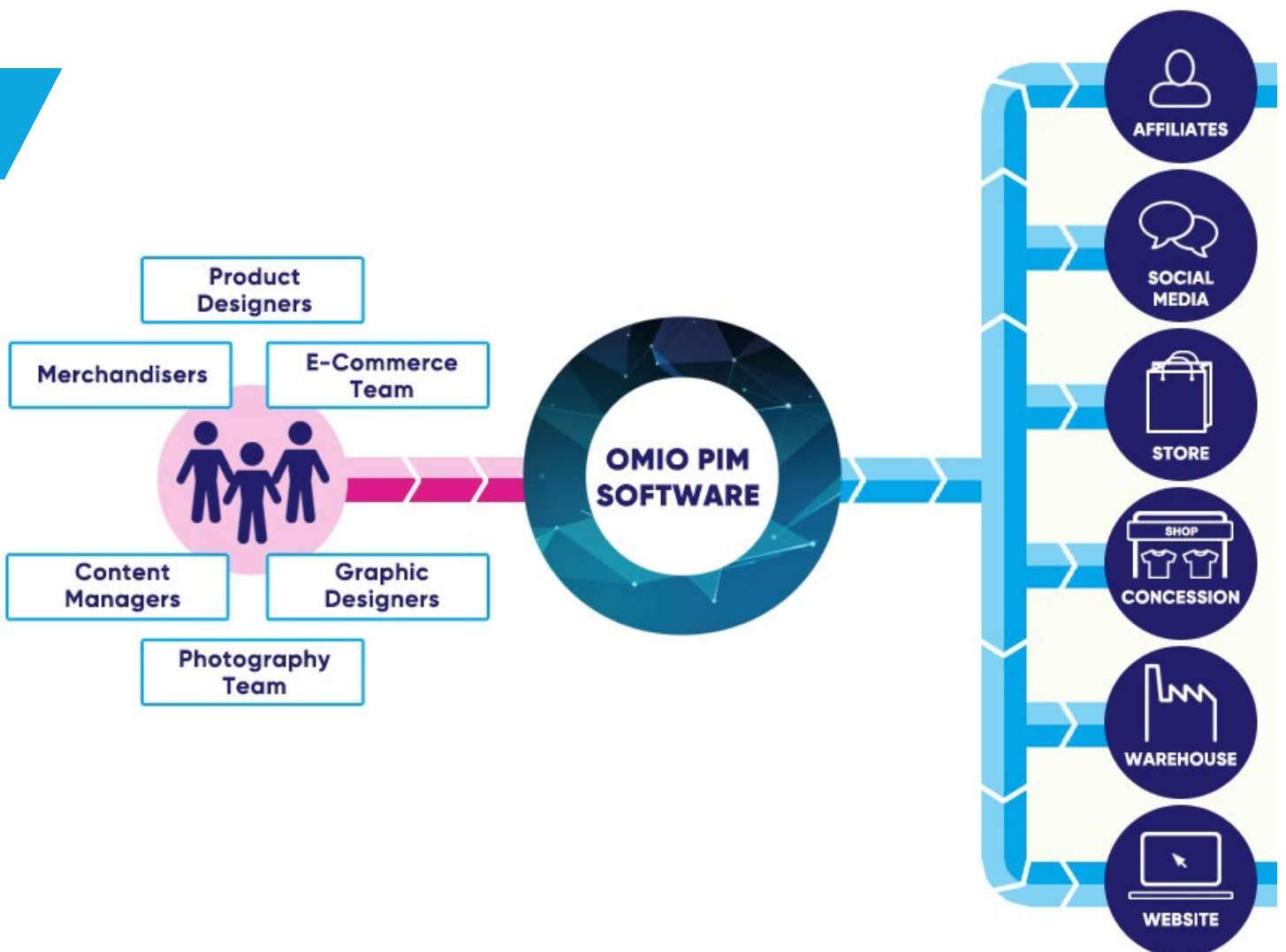
The number of contributing teams, and the varying information they require surrounding the product, calls for a centralised system capable

of unifying product information in one accurate, real-time, dynamic view. Flexible attributes ensure that the most relevant information can be accessed by different teams.

PIM systems must support multiple geographic locations, as well as the maintenance and modification of item master data by the retailer's teams and third parties where necessary.

Retailing is more dynamic than ever. Teams need the ability to make bulk edits or large scale changes to product information.

They also need to be able to modify and update pricing, descriptions, attributes, and categories, simultaneously, or for groups of products, quickly and efficiently.



**Fast forward to today, where the number of channels is expanding at a rapid rate. An essential part of most retailers' strategies are partners, franchises, concessions and affiliates. Channel partner standards are changing, which places new demands on retailers.**

### **Why do retailers need a PIM?**

When retailers were single channel, using only bricks-and-mortar stores to sell their products, the need for detailed product information was negated by store assistants, who provided all the information about a product that a customer required. Add to this a slower pace of product introduction, and a smaller inventory, a PIM might not have been a priority.

With a proliferation of channels, and different demands for product information, managing products is a labour-intensive nightmare, especially if multiple systems are used. For example, a new franchise partner might require information in a different format to your own brand standards. There might be different 'rules' for web images – is the product displayed on a model? How many shots are required? – Or attributes – is your standard code for red (RED) acceptable?

Once a retailer's product is ready to release to market, administrative blockers such as product information conformity causes serious delay. Your product simply does not make it to market competitively. Furthermore, if your attributes are not provided in the correct format for different channels, your product will fall low in any searches, reducing saleability.

**A PIM solution makes the product introduction and acceptance process easier to manage through greater efficiency and accuracy, with a single place to record rich product information.**

## // How do I link product images with content?

**Attribution** is a critical part of product information, not only for Merchandising teams to analyse a product's performance, but also to drive the omnichannel customer experience.

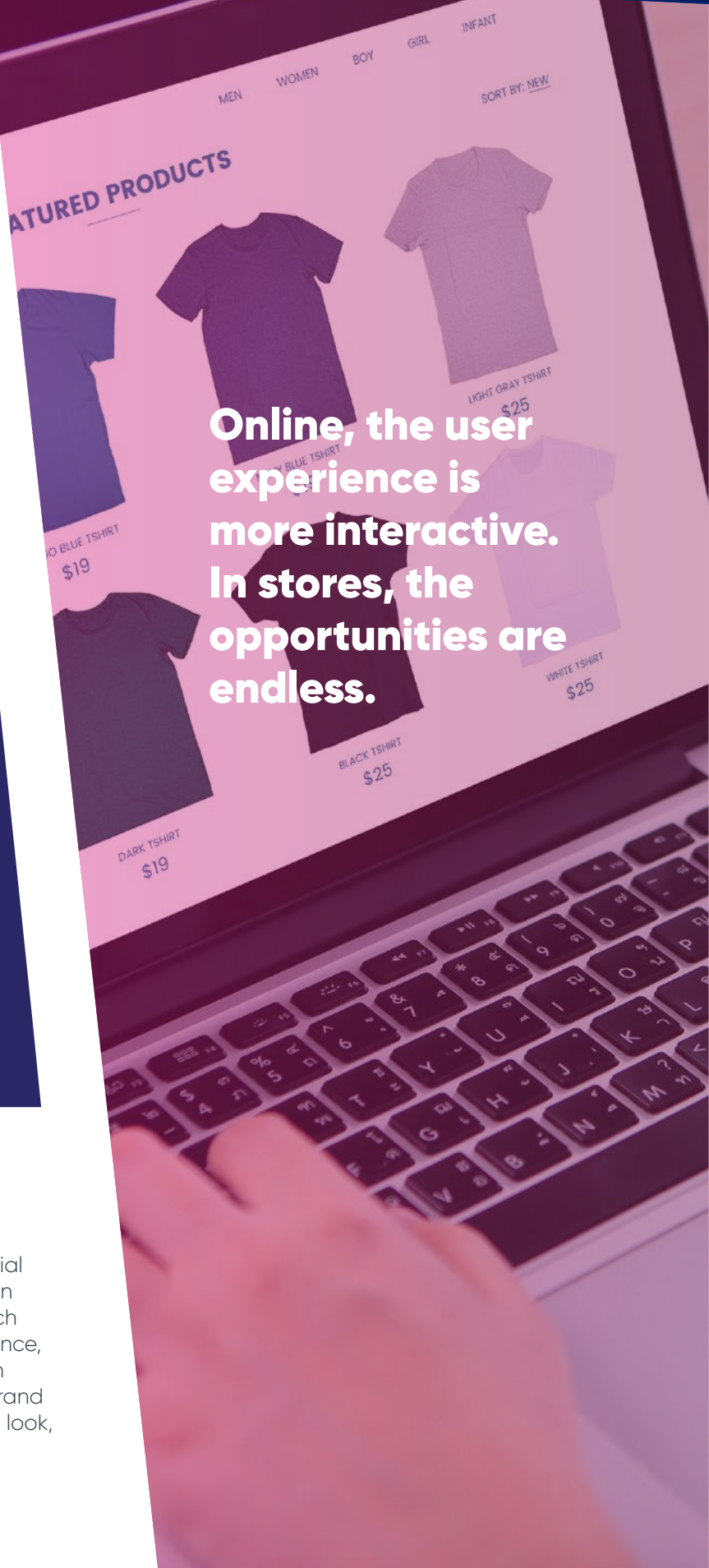
Retailers use product attributes to add merchandising details, such as rich text, images, and videos to the descriptions of products that you offer in your retail stores, or online.

In the warehouse too, operators have better visibility and clarity over the items in the order if the product descriptions are relevant.

**By adding product attributes, you provide rich product information that your store associates need to serve the customer, and that the customer needs to serve themselves**

Alongside standard customisable attributes, the ability to link images within product attribution benefits teams in the warehouse and stores.

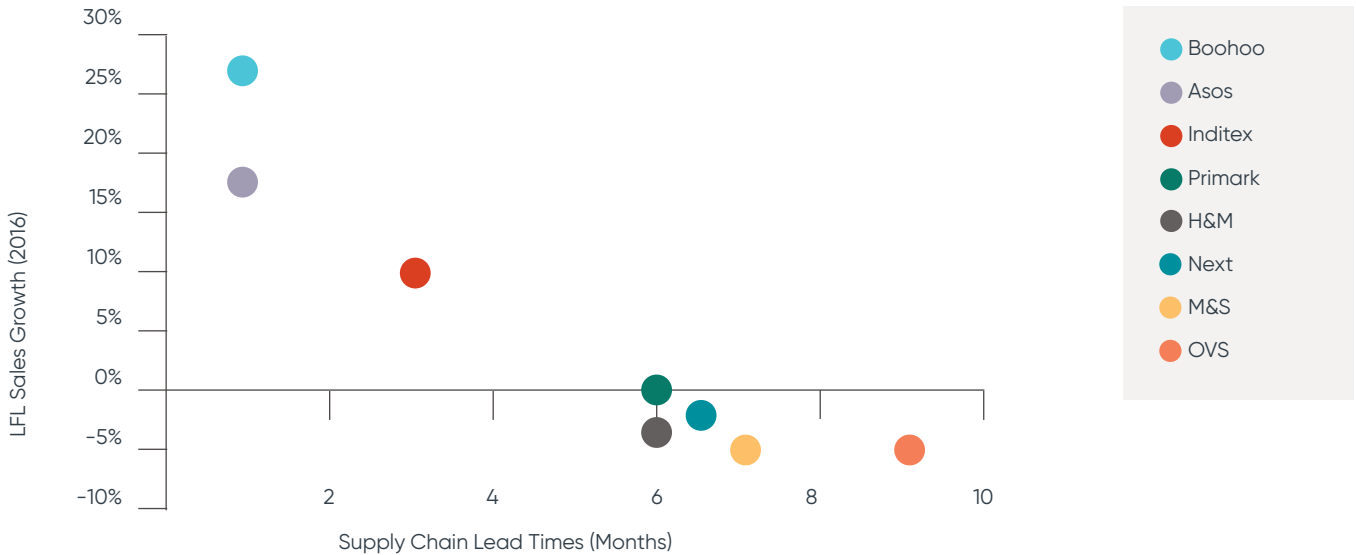
**Web attribution** functionality has become essential for digital and ecommerce teams using attribution as a key part of web definition and product search criteria. It shapes the overall website user experience, by controlling the way products are displayed. An ecommerce team may use attributes to create brand "stories", which might display all items in a certain look, or seasonal products for example.



**Online, the user experience is more interactive. In stores, the opportunities are endless.**

## / Benefits of a best-of-breed PIM solution

### Sales Growth Vs Supply Chain Lead Times



### Market-ready products: fast fashion and efficiency

The rise and rise of Asos, the boom of the Boohoos and proliferation of Pretty Little Things. With even newer and younger retailers bidding to catch up, **the fast fashion market is only becoming faster, and changing the traditional retail industry with a non-seasonality model of product lifecycles.**

As the shelf-life of retail products diminishes, with some having as little as 6-8 weeks on sale, creating and launching products must be accelerated in order to remain competitive. **It comes as no surprise that retailers with shorter supply chain leads times, introducing new products at a faster rate, experience much greater sales growth (Goldman Sachs, 2017).**

As a tangible example of the sheer amount of inventory a PIM solution should manage, Retail Assist identified a critical business requirement to extend our standard PIM product code, to enable one of our customers to launch 1 million products and beyond.

Frequently changing product information is also handled efficiently by PIM, to ensure easy re-class and re-coding, especially during time critical periods and promotions.

### Consistent and unique view of the product

**The ability of a PIM system to deliver a view of the product that is both consistent** (reliable in its accuracy), **and unique** (a product description relevant to each particular user), **is one of the biggest benefits of advanced product information management.**

Successful retail is collaborative, and therefore shared workflow processes within PIM allow the extended retail business and third parties to participate in the product definition and enrichment process. However, ensuring that this is normalised into one format with no duplication is critical.

As every channel is updated, product descriptions differ for the purchase order, warehouse operators, social media managers, ecommerce team, and store associates. For example, there is no value in a warehouse operator knowing that a pair of jeans have a "bestseller" web attribute, and that they go well with your new-in boots. However, it can be useful for them to see an image of the product on their RF gun to match the item they are picking. Alternatively, a social media content manager does not need to know the purchase order information of a product.

### 100% Accuracy

**In a given season, the average retailer introduces more than 60% new products to its inventory, with 20% errors due to duplicate information.**

A fragmented environment where product information is concerned leads to poor data quality, operational inefficiencies, and a slow time to market. Eliminating these challenges starts with a dependable and trusted management system. PIM solutions remove duplication of product information, which wastes time and resources.

**With many different inputs to a PIM solution, the rich real-time information held within the system allows retailers to seize timely business opportunities with confidence.**

## Customer Experience

**Customers want a seamless buying experience. When they begin a search, either broad or specific, online or offline, they expect to find the item they want, fast.**

customer. The direct, negative impact on the customer experience due to poor PIM can be underestimated.

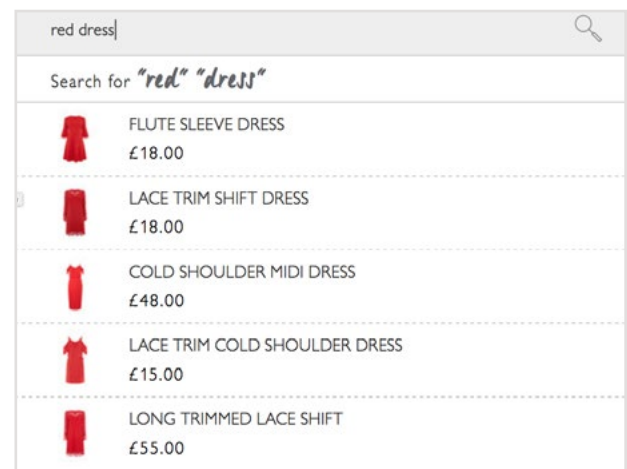
Customers may use product attributes to drill down to find exactly what they want (a red dress), or use search tools to compare like-for-like choices (a new pair of jeans). By assigning the most relevant attributes to your product, and making the search process more successful, less steps from the initial inspiration to completing the purchase is a win-win for the retailer and customer alike.

Improved product information management adds considerable value to the omnichannel customer experience. The digitisation of stores has opened up a retailer's inventory to offer more opportunities for enriching the product.

### Ease of searching a product

Customers want a seamless buying experience. When they begin a search, either broad or specific, online or offline, they expect to find the item they want, fast.

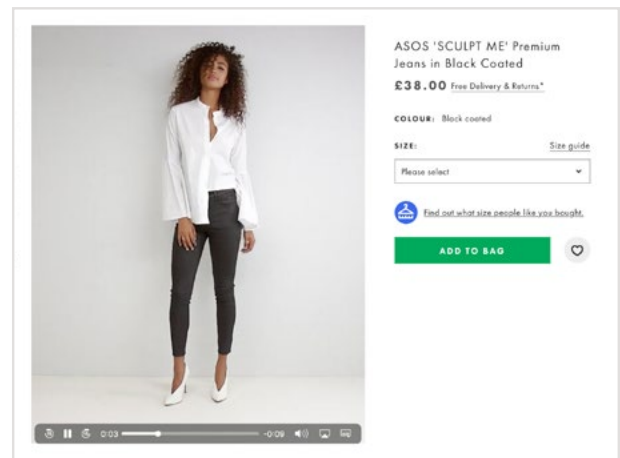
Most customers have experienced the frustration of searching a retailer's brand online, to find that its ecommerce search functionality offers no relevant results. If a product is listed incorrectly or inaccurately in your internal system, the same goes for the way in which it is displayed to the



## /Content Enrichment

Your customer has an item in their basket online, but a static image of a model wearing the product just cannot convert them. They need to see how it fits, or how it could be styled, before hitting the buy button: it's a common barrier to completing the purchase. Bring in the catwalk video – epitomised by Asos, and used by many retailers today.

Just like an image, multimedia such as video content is also linked to products through attribution within a PIM system.



**Product videos increase the likelihood of purchases by 85%, contributing to an increase in organic search traffic (Buffer, 2016).**

## /Complete the look

The power of the store associate to fulfil the in-store shopper has been supported by advances in omnichannel retailing. **If you have a single view of stock, and a single view of the product, cross-selling products is simple and efficient.**

Cross-selling can be attribution driven, thanks to complementary products being tagged in the PIM system. For example, if a customer is trying on a black dress, the store associate can perform a tablet inventory search to pull through a complete look in the search results to show to the customer. For customer engagement purposes – forming long lasting relationships with loyal customers – this product visibility is essential.

Retailers using self-service digital screens or tablet devices in-store can also provide the customer with the ability to find matching products themselves. Of course, this is also replicated online through web attributes.

**If you have a single view of stock, and a single view of the product, cross-selling products is simple and efficient.**





**Want to explore our PIM Solution?**

If any aspect of this whitepaper has interested you, or you'd like to find out more about implementing omnichannel solutions, please contact us on [marketing@retail-assist.com](mailto:marketing@retail-assist.com) or 0115 9042777 to arrange an exploratory meeting.

**Brands already benefiting from our Omnichannel Supply Chain Solutions include:**

