IBM Product Information Management for Commerce: Leverage product data to gain competitive advantage

Highlights

■ *Establish a complete view of product information by defining it centrally and collecting it in single repository where it can be managed and maintained*

■ *Improve customer loyalty by providing customers with rich, relevant, accurate and consistent information about your products, according to their preferences and preferred purchasing channel*

■ *Bring products to market faster—increasing revenues and cutting costs—by shortening the cycle time required to publish the right product information on your Web site*

■ *Enable business users to collaborate on creating and updating product information, eliminating bottlenecks and helping to ensure that the latest and most accurate data is available*

In every industry and sector of global business today—whether retail, electronics, consumer goods or telecommunications—companies are searching for ways to establish and maintain profitable customer relationships. You must offer superior levels of service and convenience ahead of the competition and develop strategies that allow you to reach your customers in ways that support their needs at every stage of the purchasing process. You have to create a seamless customer experience across all your channels and provide the same accurate, consistent and relevant

information about your products at every customer touchpoint. Whether your customers want to research your products online, evaluate them in your store or buy them over the phone or online, you want to make sure that they can get the information about your products that they need.

A first step many companies take when investing in a multichannel strategy is building an e-commerce system. Today, as the competition for customers increases and budgets tighten, companies must also focus on improving operational efficiencies, while simultaneously improving responsiveness to the next trend or customer requirement. Furthermore, companies are trying to reduce costs, increase profit margins and gain competitive advantage.

Deliver comprehensive product content to every customer touchpoint

One area where you can gain competitive advantage is product information management for commerce—tackling the delivery of accurate, consistent

and timely product information to employees, customers and suppliers across channels.

You may already know that compelling product information helps build stronger customer relationships and can help increase sales. To compete with the thousands of competitors' products brought to market every year, you need to quickly introduce your own new products, in the context of appropriate promotions, pricing and merchandising strategies. You also have to retire products and handle the associated price markdowns and other clearance activities. Creating and maintaining all the dimensions of information that you need to present about every product, across your value chain, can be a very time-consuming and staff-intensive process. Not only does this information reside in different, discrete systems across your organization and your partners' organizations, but it is also owned and managed by people belonging to a variety of teams across multiple business units.

Product information management for commerce is about gaining control over product data and managing the collaborative processes to create, update and enhance it. The results can bring success to your multichannel strategies and help extend your e-commerce investments.

Bring together best-of-breed technologies with IBM Product Information Management for Commerce

IBM® WebSphere® Commerce is a comprehensive solution for creating world-class, sell-side e-commerce systems. With this robust solution, you can build the cornerstone of your multichannel strategy to help you market, merchandise and sell your products worldwide. WebSphere Commerce lets your business users directly create compelling and competitive e-commerce Web sites. It also delivers an interactive environment where your customers can use product information according to their preferences, depending on where they are in the purchasing process.

IBM WebSphere Product Center, a leading product information management solution, enables collaboration around the creation, definition and enhancement of your product information—which is the foundation of a successful multichannel initiative. WebSphere Product Center provides a central collaborative repository for product information that enables business users to create and manage one comprehensive definition of product information. This information, acquired from various sources across your organization and value chain, is aggregated into the central repository and easily leveraged by the various applications requiring the data, such as your Web site and store. As a result, you can more easily manage the large volume of updates and enhancements that your business requires.

By leveraging the customizable workflows and hierarchy mappings, your business users can prepare large amounts of product information with a multitude of attributes and then publish it to your e-commerce Web sites. With all your product information in one place, you are also prepared to embrace other initiatives that depend on product information, such as global data synchronization (GDS) and radio frequency identification (RFID).

Leverage two best-of-breed products in a market-leading solution

Together, WebSphere Commerce and WebSphere Product Center software provide a product information management for commerce solution that can help you address sell-side e-commerce challenges, such as:

- *Accelerating time to market of new products*
- *Quickly creating and publishing timely marketing campaigns and cross-sell, up-sell and price promotions*
- *Helping to ensure that product information is consistent and accurate no matter where customers encounter it*
- *Enabling business users with diverse responsibilities to collaborate, create and maintain the variety of unique product attributes you need to provide to your customers and partners*

- *Eliminating IT bottlenecks by involving business users directly*
- *Creating a single view of product information within a heterogeneous IT environment across numerous functional business units*
- *Decreasing the time spent on complex review and approval processes by automating the steps involved in these processes—freeing up your teams to conceive new ideas for additional revenue streams*
- *Optimizing business processes that can truly differentiate your company's product and services offerings to partners and customers*

Managing increasing volumes and speed of product information

Two dimensions of product information management exist for commerce: managing the product information itself, and managing the people and processes that are involved with creating the data. For example, many companies realize that their back-end processes require significant improvement to support bringing products to market more quickly. To address this issue, they employ numerous creative

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merchandising tactics with the goal of getting products from production centers into customers' hands in the shortest time possible. They might run weekly promotions by e-mail that drive Web traffic, or publish seasonal catalogs concurrently with a main selection of products. Some businesses are built on multiple brands or concepts, or sell to different customer sets—such as business buyers or consumers.

Whatever the situation, companies like these must create, link and organize product information to support these tactics, sometimes concurrently or on competing timelines. This dynamic creates the effect of product information increasing in volume and speed. Managing it all can be overwhelming, and the task of updating hundreds of thousands of products one by one or re-keying data that was entered incorrectly can be almost insurmountable.

But with the right product information management for commerce solution, you can take advantage of a range of features and capabilities, including:

- *The capacity to house large numbers of products, and enable large numbers of concurrent users to maintain it*
- *An extensible data model that allows you to support virtually unlimited numbers of attributes to describe your products appropriately*
- *The ability to link unstructured data to each product record—such as documents, engineering diagrams, user manuals, warranty information and product specification sheets, among others—to give partners and customers the most accurate, timely information available*
- *The ability to create multiple versions of product information to be managed and published without affecting prior versions (managing products in multiple hierarchies). For example, you can create and maintain a holiday catalog with an assortment of gift products without disrupting the everyday catalog of products*
- *Attribute dictionaries that accelerate the task of enhancing product information, and help prevent users from making data-entry mistakes*

Managing people and processes

Whatever the process—introducing a new product, re-launching an existing one, developing a campaign or promotion or just doing daily updates on product information—it requires tasks, activities, reviews and approvals. Business users across the organization are involved in today's commerce processes. People from various functions own elements of product information that are instrumental in creating a complete, correct and relevant picture of your products for your customers—whatever the touchpoint. They might come from engineering, product marketing, merchandising, procurement, finance, pricing or logistics—maybe even from partner organizations.

WebSphere Product Center combined with WebSphere Commerce provides the ability to automate and streamline the interactions between the people within those processes—

helping businesses improve their competitive advantage in multichannel strategies. With WebSphere Product Center and WebSphere Commerce, you can take advantage of leading-edge product information management capabilities, including:

- *Workflow and e-mail notifications to orchestrate the tasks and contributions of people across multiple functions and to automate product information management processes*

- *Support for multiple-language versions of product information that enables marketing and sales teams to manage and enhance product information in their own languages, to best suit national preferences or business customs*

- *User access controls that allow people in specific roles to see only specific pieces of information and gives them specific privileges to perform only the tasks assigned to them. For example, the product manager of the men's clothing line has full access to create, change and approve those product records, but has view-only access to the women's clothing information*

A solution that can grow with your business

Effective product information management is fundamental to the success of your overall e-commerce strategy. For this reason, you must consider how you can provide your customers with on demand access to up-to-date product information.

WebSphere Commerce and WebSphere Product Center offer a robust solution, because product information provides the foundation for virtually every e-commerce transaction. Leverage your product information to operate your business at the speed the market dictates and your employees need. Become more efficient and respond faster. Get a jump on your competitors. And realize significant business benefits as a result.

For more information

To learn more about the IBM Product Information Management for Commerce solution, built on best-of-breed IBM WebSphere Commerce and IBM WebSphere Product Center, please visit **ibm.com**/software/data/ips/ solutions/optimization/retail.html

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