

The first step was investing in an e-commerce system to build this multichannel strategy, and help your organization become an on demand business. And now, as the competition for customers increases and budgets tighten, you must also focus on improving operational efficiencies — not just your responsiveness to the next trend or customer requirement. More basically, you want to reduce costs, increase your profit margins and derive more value from your e-commerce investments.

Deliver rich product content to every customer touchpoint

One area you can leverage to 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 sales channels and at every customer touchpoint. You already know that solid product information helps build stronger business relationships and increase sales. To compete with the thousands of competitors' products brought to market every year, you need to be quick to introduce your own new products, in the context of the appropriate promotions, pricing and merchandising strategies. You also have to retire products — and handle price markdowns and other clearance activities for these

items. 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 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 processes to update and enhance it. The result can bring success to your multichannel strategies and extend your e-commerce investments.

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 by taking advantage of its rich features 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. And it delivers an interactive environment where your customers can use product information according to their preferences, depending on where they are in the purchasing process.

With IBM WebSphere Product Center, you get an equally comprehensive solution for enterprise product information management, enabling you to establish a foundation for success in your multichannel initiatives. WebSphere Product Center provides a central repository for product information from various sources across your organization and value chain. After the information is aggregated into its central repository, you can more easily manage the large volume of updates and enhancements that your business needs require. Prepare large amounts of product information, with multitudes of attributes. Publish it to your e-commerce Web sites — and involve the business users who own the most current and accurate version. And, 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 ensure that product information is consistent and accurate no matter where customers encounter it.*
- *Being able to extend promotions to your various channels to attract customers and drive their buying decisions more effectively.*
- *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.*
- *Decreasing the time spent on complex review and approval processes, by automating the steps involved in these processes – and 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 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 to update hundreds of thousands of products one by one or to rekey 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 unlimited 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. 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 prevent users from making data-entry mistakes.*

Managing people and processes

Whatever the process — introducing a new product, relaunching an existing one, developing a campaign or promotion, or just doing daily updates on product information — any tasks, activities, reviews and approvals are required. Business users from 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 to 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 provide the ability to automate and streamline the interactions of these 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 — enabling 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 give 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 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 .

Because product and service information provides the foundation for virtually any e-commerce transaction, WebSphere Commerce and WebSphere Product Center software offer a robust solution. 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 IBM WebSphere Commerce and IBM WebSphere Product Center solutions, visit:

ibm.com/websphere/prodinfomgmt



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