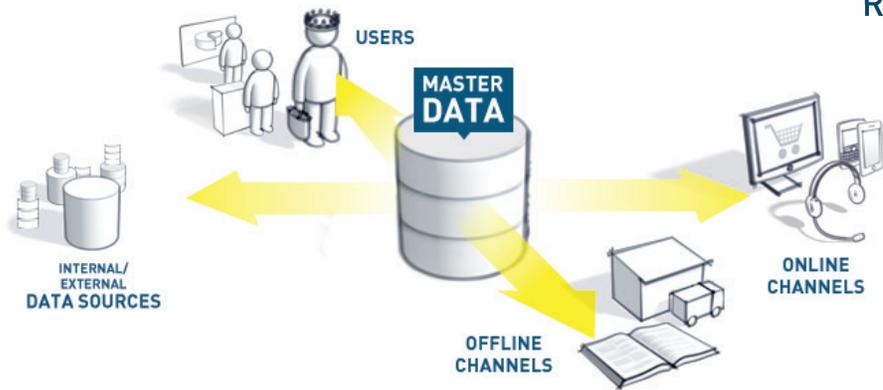


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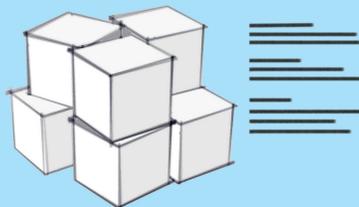
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# MANAGING PRODUCT CONTENT FOR OMNI-CHANNEL COMMERCE

Best Practices to Consider when  
Evaluating Commerce MDM Vendors and Solutions



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In recent years, the rise of omnichannel commerce and proliferation of digital channels have precipitated seismic shifts in consumer behavior. Customers who might have previously been motivated by brand loyalty are now faced with a superabundance of shopping options and limited time to navigate them – a scenario that promotes more carefully considered purchasing decisions in response to precise desires and requirements.

Embracing **effective product content management** is the first step towards empowering customers with relevant, real-time information to drive conversions and close sales. Whether a customer is conducting in-store research on a tablet or smartphone, or comparison shopping from a computer at home, product content is critical to the pre-purchase process. For both B2B and B2C businesses, leveraging product content consistently across multiple channels and customer experiences is the key to meeting the customers' expectations and creating a competitive advantage. An effective product content strategy coupled with the right technology can foster the seamless customer dialogue intrinsic to omnichannel success.

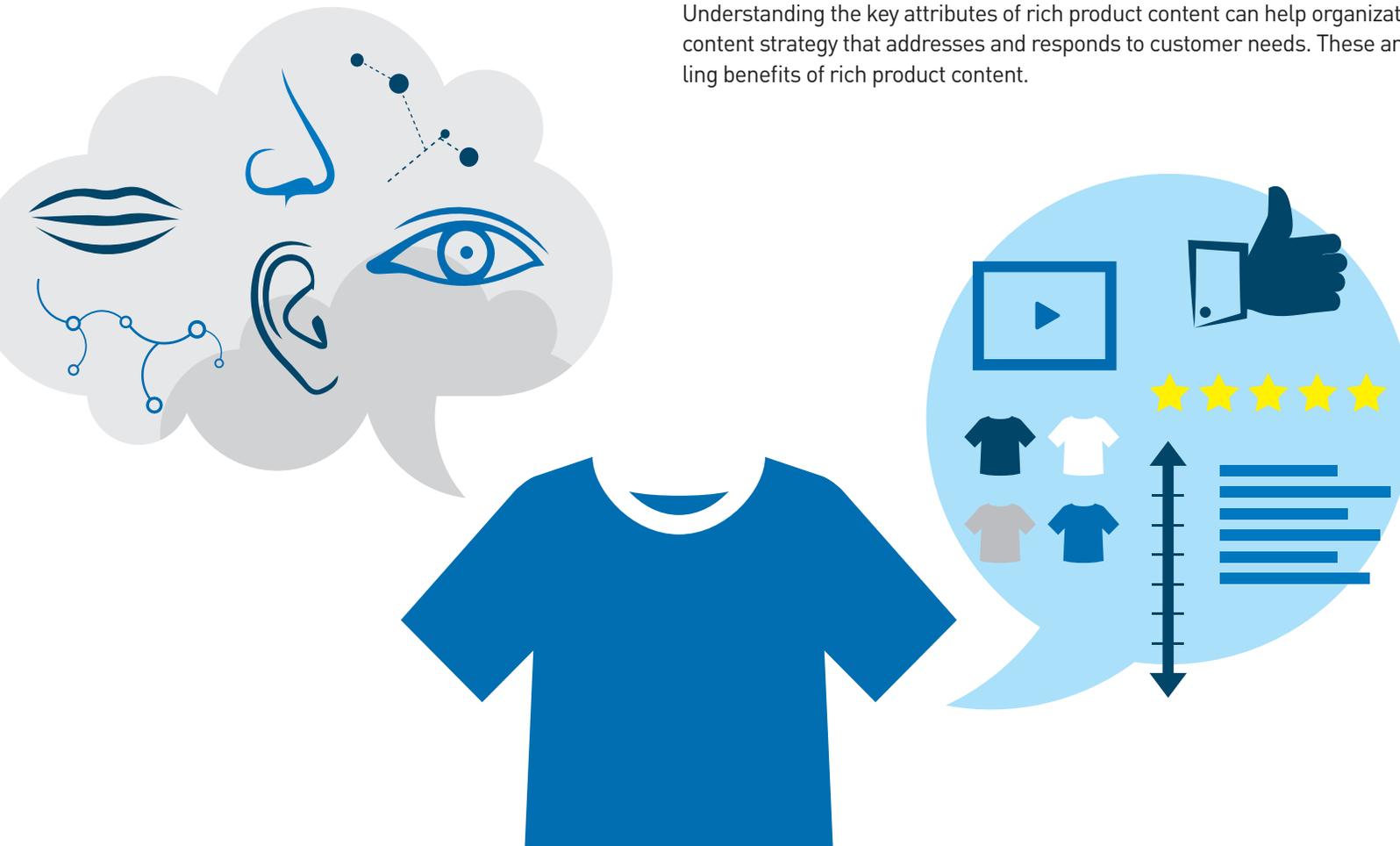
This paper explores the deepening relationship between product content and conversion, and offers strategies for using content to gain an intimate understanding of customer needs. It also combines practical advice and best practice insights on ways to leverage product content to engage and capture the contemporary customer, and provides a roadmap for businesses in the process of implementing a successful product content management strategy. Most importantly, it illustrates how product content management can strengthen customer relationships and pave the way for exponential omnichannel growth.

# The Case for Rich Product Content

In the offline world, customers are able to make purchasing decisions based on a set of tactile encounters with concrete outcomes. Conversations with sales staff, the act of touching and trying on the merchandise, and asking a friend for a second opinion are among the determining factors in the buying process.

In the online sphere, rich product content can bridge the gap between purchase intent and conversion, driving increased sales and higher order values, and setting the stage for long-term growth of digital properties.

Understanding the key attributes of rich product content can help organizations tailor a product content strategy that addresses and responds to customer needs. These are the most compelling benefits of rich product content.



# Customer-Centric Online Experiences and Destination Sites

Consider the case of a customer shopping for a pair of winter boots, engaged in a period of pre-purchase research. Imagine presenting her with the right combination of product content that correlates exactly with her needs – everything from the right size, style, and color to customer reviews, product video, styling advice, delivery information, and the promise of post-purchase support – at critical moments in the buying process.

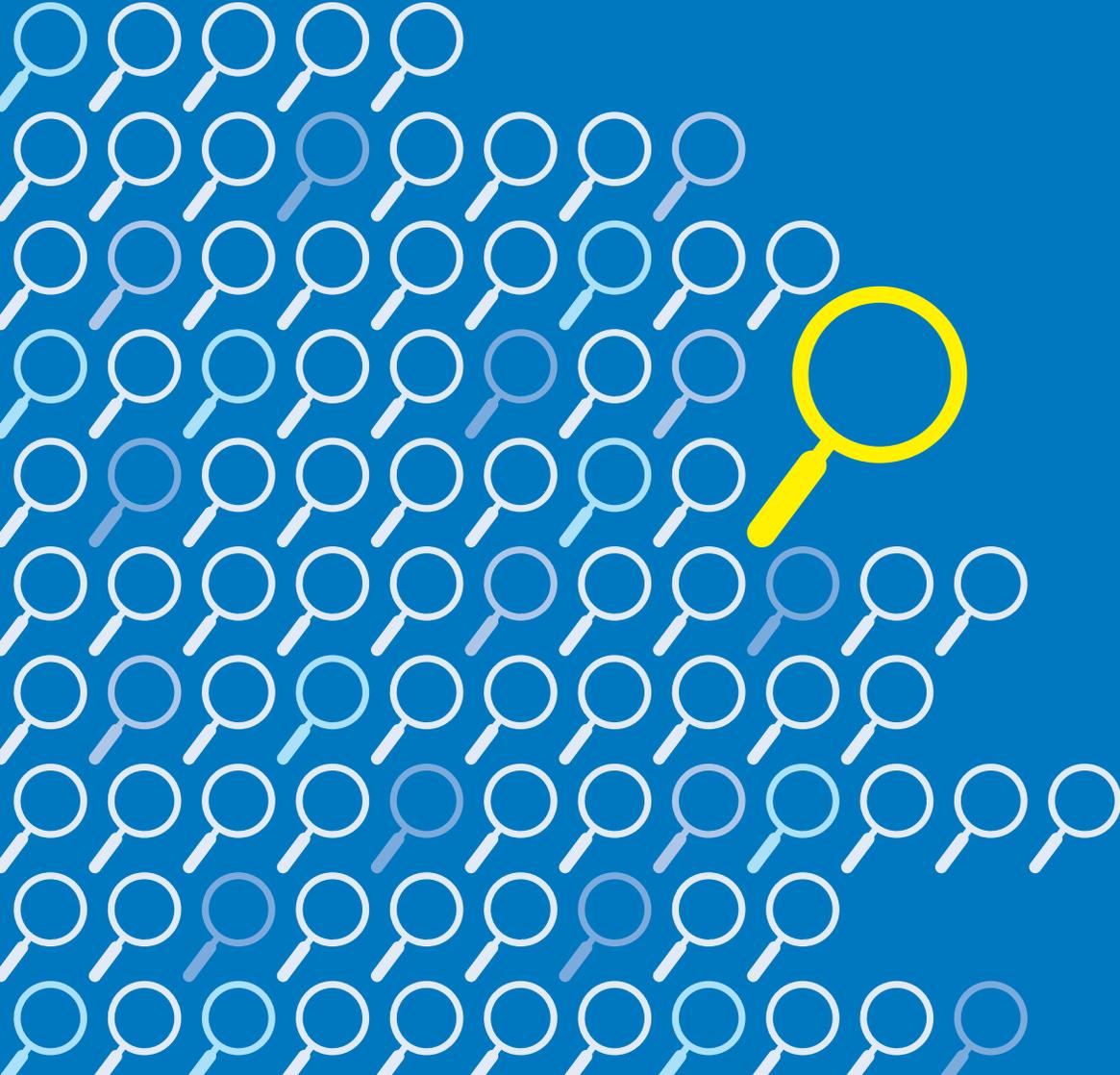
In the case above, **the ability to serve up highly relevant product content during this optimal timeframe and across multiple touchpoints can be a key driver of conversion, and the deciding factor that clinches an online sale.**

In a 2012 blog, Russ Somers, VP of Marketing at Invodo, reported on the success of Step2, a manufacturer of toys for

preschoolers and toddlers distributed through more than 70 retailers worldwide. Step2 found that shoppers who view videos are 174% more likely to purchase than shoppers who do not. Astute merchants know that inspiring content can deliver an experience that is fun and entertaining for many customers, which drives loyalty and increases business.

The power of product content goes beyond the point of purchase to shape every stage of the customer lifecycle. Such content as blog posts, product articles, videos, high resolution photos, and purchase recommendations are playing a central role in establishing customer loyalty and building a community around a brand – a factor that cultivates profitable customer relationships and produced both repeat business and higher margins.



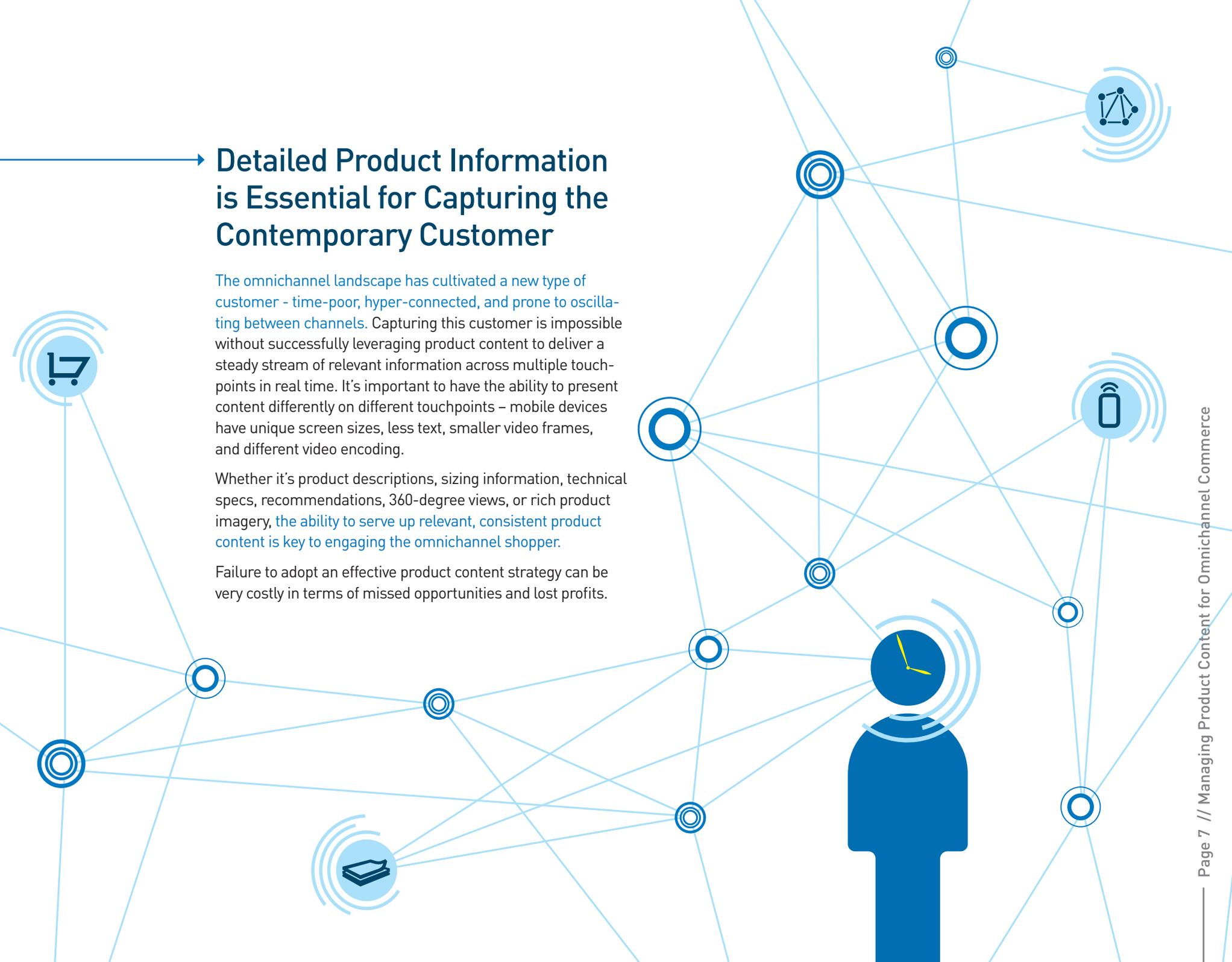


## Increasing SEO Value and Driving Search Traffic

There is no denying that **search plays a critical role in online success**. Brick-and-mortar retailers might lure customers with physical storefronts, but e-retailers need to cultivate high levels of online discoverability to stimulate search traffic and secure ongoing sales.

**Rich product content can dramatically improve search results rankings and boost organic search traffic.** Although SEO is central to generating traffic and driving conversion, Google's recent algorithm changes have had game-changing implications for search marketing best practices. The search giant's newest algorithm has moved its focus from keyword placement towards rich, relevant content, a new direction that rewards customer-centric businesses with higher page rankings and greater levels of online visibility.

This means that **the ability to offer accurate, real-time product content is no longer a competitive advantage but an essential component for survival.** Businesses that invest in this new imperative are better placed to reap SEO rewards. For example, products with optimized videos have "a 50 times better chance" of showing up on the first page in Google results, according to Nate Elliott at Forrester Research.



## Detailed Product Information is Essential for Capturing the Contemporary Customer

The omnichannel landscape has cultivated a new type of customer - time-poor, hyper-connected, and prone to oscillating between channels. Capturing this customer is impossible without successfully leveraging product content to deliver a steady stream of relevant information across multiple touchpoints in real time. It's important to have the ability to present content differently on different touchpoints – mobile devices have unique screen sizes, less text, smaller video frames, and different video encoding.

Whether it's product descriptions, sizing information, technical specs, recommendations, 360-degree views, or rich product imagery, the ability to serve up relevant, consistent product content is key to engaging the omnichannel shopper.

Failure to adopt an effective product content strategy can be very costly in terms of missed opportunities and lost profits.

# Leveraging Product Content in a Changing World

The case for rich product content might be clear, but meeting the practical challenges that accompany a winning product content strategy can be a little more elusive. [Successful omnichannel commerce depends on the ability to create a seamless customer experience across every touchpoint and channel](#) – a fact that calls for a repository of centralized, real-time content and a single customer view.

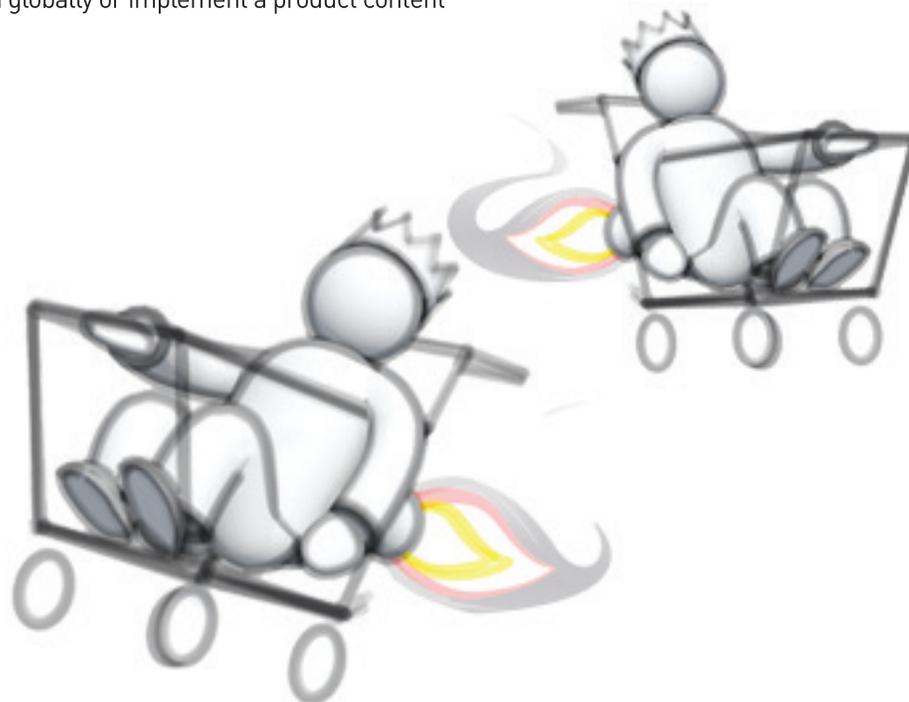
Developing and managing product content are among the most expensive and challenging aspects of managing a commerce operation. The right content is critical to customer education

and conversions. Incorrect or unclear content can have seriously negative consequences for brand reputation and revenues. Therefore, it's crucial to manage product content and business data as assets – with all their complexity – so they can be effectively leveraged to drive sales.

Many businesses employ numerous, separate data systems that don't "talk" to each other and restrict cross-channel visibility. This can result in a partial, fragmented view of the customer that damages brand credibility and impacts conversion rates. Also, using those systems to expand globally or implement a product content

strategy can create dangerous levels of channel conflict – a crisis that sees inconsistent product information destroy the omnichannel experience and threaten revenue.

[By investing in a best-of-breed master data management solution for commerce \(MDM/C\), businesses can capitalize on the power of product content to build customer relationships while embarking on a product content strategy that minimizes channel conflict and maximizes gains.](#)





## Burberry Case Study: How Digital Product Information Can Enrich the Physical Store Experience

Quite possibly the best example in 2012 of physical-digital commerce convergence was pioneering British fashion house Burberry, as it premiered stunning new brick and mortar stores blended with immersive, digital components showcasing its iconic products.

“The brand’s strategies focus not only on improving the customer’s shopping experience, but on how to give each client a personalized experience according to their needs and expectations,” said Dalia Strum, president of Dalia Inc. of New York, quoted in *Luxury Daily*.

Burberry’s extravagant “retail theatre” experience includes live music, satellite video feeds, outbound social tweets, iPad-equipped sales clerks, plus lights and images projected onto the world’s tallest indoor retail screen. An “architecturally stunning” 44,000-square-foot museum-like store in London is designed as a physical expression of the company’s Burberry.com website, including hundreds of digital screens, some displaying images from Burberry’s interactive online Art of the Trench project, where real people post photos of themselves wearing Burberry trench coats. RFID chips attached to clothes and accessories enable shoppers to carry them to six-foot digital displays in fitting rooms to view content about a product’s craftsmanship, and perhaps a video of a model wearing a skirt or another apparel item.

In an interview published by *Mashable*, Burberry Chief Creative Officer Christopher Bailey explained his core strategy. “We started looking at Burberry.com and making the experience you have there very rich, one that shows the whole world what Burberry is about. We wanted, when you walked into the Regent Street store, to feel exactly the same atmosphere, to engage with it in the same way that you might be able to engage online.”

“It’s very easy to allow an iconic brand to remain true to its heritage and at the same time obsolete itself,” retail industry analyst Marshal Cohen told the *Associated Press*. “The hard thing to do is keep the iconic brand relevant. This is about somebody at the helm deciding they’re going to find a way to keep the brand relevant for the future.”

Despite a lot of press coverage for Burberry, not all observers have been 100 percent positive. Forrester analyst Martin Gill noted in a blog, “Where the whole thing was lacking for me was in the multichannel integration. There’s no way [other than with an associate’s iPad] for a customer to access their online account, pull up their wish list, or pre-shop in a connected way. Online social content isn’t really represented [and] there’s no online payment integration.”

# Roadmap to Better Commerce Master Data Management (MDM/C)

The right MDM/C solution should serve as a vehicle for a customer-centric content strategy and allow businesses to easily leverage the power of rich product content to build customer relationships and generate sales. The following sections describe some of the critical features of a fully capable MDM/C system.

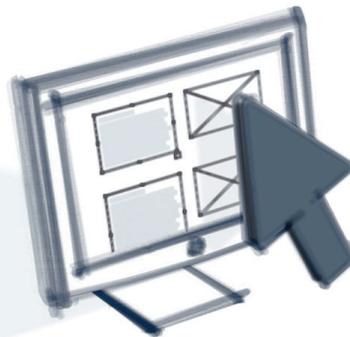
## Support for Global Expansion

Although e-commerce technology can enable retailers to create stores without walls, it also allows them to build stores without borders. A good MDM/C system should make it easy for businesses to tap into the global marketplace by supporting multiple languages, local currency country-specific forms of customization and personalization, differentiated assortments, and differentiated product presentations or attributions.



## Customizable User Interfaces

For businesses dealing with large volumes of data, it is important to invest in MDM/C technology that offers intuitive, user-friendly ways to manage different forms of product data. A MDM/C system that incorporates a customizable user interface is a powerful way to make significant improvements in productivity, especially when a large number of people work with the data.

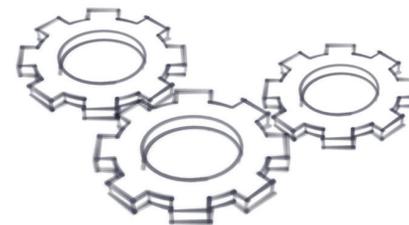


## Seamless Workflow Functionality

To run a successful omnichannel operation, it's vital that product data and transaction information are processed seamlessly and accurately across the business.

For example, a MDM/C system should ensure that changes registered by an offline sales associate can be accessed in real time by the staff member manning the call center – it should allow collaborative tasks to play out seamlessly and make it simple for multiple parties to work in parallel.

This workflow functionality has powerful consequences for customer relationships. Equipping staff with real-time access to customer data and product content can set the stage for a personalized approach that bodes well for conversion and increased sales.



## Product Data Storage

Product data is among a company's most valuable and important assets. [The ability to centrally store, organize and disseminate product data can help promote customer intelligence that enables companies to mine revenue opportunities and drive growth.](#)

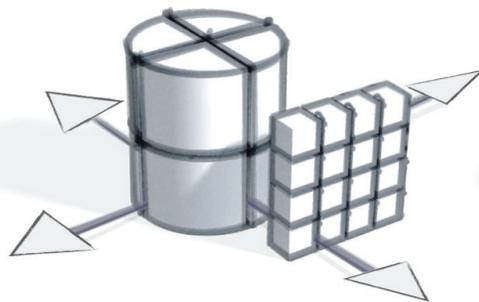
A MDM/C system should help businesses achieve this by offering a streamlined way to store, organize, and control data, product content, and digital assets. This makes it easy to manage a vast range of products and process frequent changes accurately and in real-time.

Robust data storage systems also ensure that content is standardized across multiple channels, a feature that removes inaccurate and redundant information and lowers storage and infrastructure costs.



## Highly Scalable Data Infrastructure

In the fast-paced world of ecommerce, [businesses need to be highly agile to adapt to market changes and stay one step ahead of competitors.](#) Unfortunately, this business message is hindered by rigid, legacy MDM/C systems that make it difficult to scale in line with new directions and sudden growth. A modern, best-of-breed MDM/C system should have built-in scalability and empower businesses to evolve and adapt with shifting market demands.

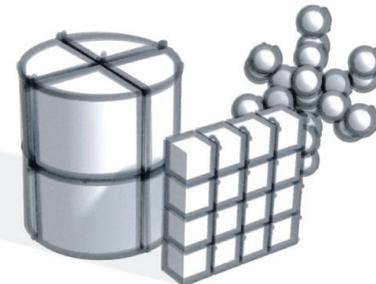


## Unstructured Editorial Content

Static content such as text-based product information and technical specs still have a place in e-commerce, but there's no denying that rich and immersive product content can help a customer experience come to life. To deliver a consistent message to customers at all times, [businesses need to aggregate, manage, and distribute content to their customers and channels, including both structured or unstructured product or editorial content.](#)

A MDM/C system should have the capacity to host customer content such as product videos, 360-degree views, and rich interactive product imagery – data assets that drive conversion and foster high levels of customer engagement.

The rise of social commerce has also seen user-generated content play a bigger role in the content mix. This heightens the imperative for MDM/C systems to host content such as product recommendations, customer ratings, and user reviews.



# MDM/C Implementation Best Practices

Although a MDM/C solution plays a powerful role in a product content strategy, success also depends on the ability to implement best practices. An effective MDM/C strategy must be based on a holistic approach that encompasses people, processes, technology, and information.

The following are key tactics to consider when implementing a MDM/C solution.

- Executive-level management must evangelize the necessary changes to business processes, policies, standards, and technology enhancements that are required for a successful product information / master data management rollout.
- Marketing is generally the primary beneficiary of MDM/C, and should be held accountable for the data governance process as well as the overall strategy and technology solution.
- Implement strong project management and organizational change management processes along with a MDM/C solution.
  - Establish clear data standards and enforce validations, rules, and compliance mechanisms to ensure that everyone in the extended ecosystem provides data correctly. Embrace a best-of-breed MDM/C system to manage reporting and compliance.
- Appoint an enterprise data guru to lead a dedicated team of data stewards and provide oversight of all data standards. This often requires a mandate and ongoing support from the highest levels of management.
  - All design processes should support continuous improvement of data repositories, workflow, and business processes. Data stewards and all those who create or manage data must be notified when changes to data are made, so that they can respond proactively and appropriately.
- Understand the MDM/C data model and how it integrates with both internal product content systems and external product content providers.
  - Organizations should generally resist the temptation to make severe customizations to the MDM/C vendor's solution – instead rely on the vendor's experience and expertise to deliver a comprehensive packaged solution.
  - Effectively communicate data management goals and initiatives to all data managers and stakeholders. This communication is key to successful implementation and ongoing management. Communication must also include current and potential vendors who share or provide product data.
  - Make arrangements to assure that all vendor updates and patches are installed in a timely manner, either by the vendor or internal systems personnel.
    - Provide support for rich content types, including structured product data, digital assets such as images and video, and unstructured editorial web content.
  - Thoroughly test the system for quality issues, make necessary corrections, and re-test on a regular basis.
  - Develop a set of guidelines on the kind of content that should be used for each unique category of product – types of text, images, video, etc.

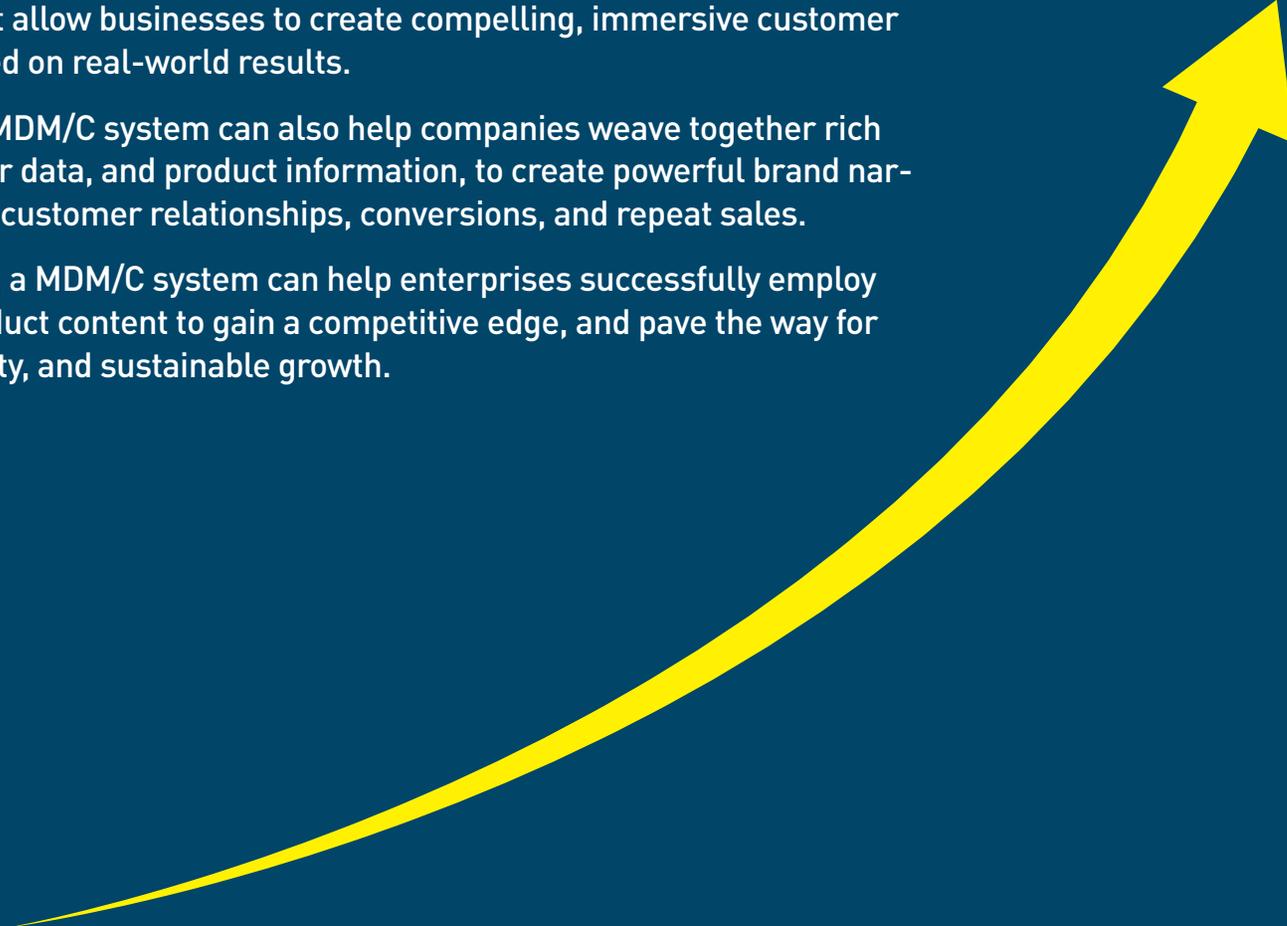
# Driving Future Growth with Product Content



Investing in a customer-centric product content strategy that enables a seamless brand experience across all touchpoints plays a critical role in futureproofing a business and driving e-commerce success on a global scale. As a result, **master data management solutions no longer serve as repositories for static product information, but instead become powerful tools for customer intelligence** – tools that allow businesses to create compelling, immersive customer experiences based on real-world results.

A best-of-breed MDM/C system can also help companies weave together rich content, customer data, and product information, to create powerful brand narratives that drive customer relationships, conversions, and repeat sales.

Most importantly, a MDM/C system can help enterprises successfully employ the power of product content to gain a competitive edge, and pave the way for profitability, loyalty, and sustainable growth.



hybris delivers enterprise software for multi-channel commerce, master data management and order management that helps retailers, manufacturers, telcos and publishers of software, games and digital media to innovate, sell more and create perpetual digital relationships with their customers. Both principal industry analyst firms rank hybris a “leader” & among the top three commerce platforms. hybris software is based on open standards, more extensible, more efficient for global deployments, and offers lower TCO. The same software is available on-premise, on-demand and managed hosted, giving merchants of all sizes maximum flexibility. Over 400 companies have chosen hybris, including global B2B brands CheckPoint Software, Grainger, TransUnion and Thomson-Reuters as well as consumer brands P&G, Coca-Cola, Toys”R”Us, Levi’s and Gymboree. hybris has operations in 15 countries around the globe. hybris is the future of commerce™.

For more information, visit [www.hybris.com](http://www.hybris.com).

If you’d like to discuss the strategies described in this paper, or meet with one of our e-commerce solutions experts to help you expand upon these concepts, please feel free to send us an email message or call our nearest office.

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