



# WHAT IS PLM?

PLM PROJECT PACK 2021

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**Whatever your role in a PLM project, inevitably you'll either be asked or will yourself ask the big question: what exactly is PLM?**

Vendors will tell you it's a piece of software, delivered on physical media on-premise, cloud installed or multi-tenant. An entire industry has been built on the idea that you can buy a discrete application that will solve all of your product design & development problems.

By definition, PLM is a software suite that comprises functionality designed to make modern, global product design & development quicker, more efficient and collaboratively. It essentially covers everything from design to delivery, and collects all of the data from every process along the way in a single, centralised location, making accurate information available to everybody from designers to sourcing managers to supply chain partners, all from one place, wherever they may be in the world.

At WhichPLM, however, we believe that PLM is much more than a piece of software. Yes, it centres on the selection and implementation of software itself, but actually refining and enhancing your product lifecycles requires more than 'just an application'.

True product lifecycle management (where the acronym itself comes from) goes beyond the tools used to achieve it, and touches virtually every aspect of the business. Whether we're talking about design or planning, the actual day-to-day work, a true digital enterprise strategy involves a complex mix of people, products and processes.

Products are the lifeblood of your business; people make the creation and delivery of them possible; processes are the intrinsic parts of your methods of working that allow the right people to get the right products to market at the right time, sustainably and at the right price.

As you can imagine, then, PLM can't *just* be about software. Software can't be creative (although it can support creativity). An application alone can't fix inefficient or outdated processes and ways of working, although it can make the transition easier. And a PLM solution, simply installed and left to its own devices,

won't provide you with a product advantage, although it will give you the tools and framework to create one for yourselves.

So we look at PLM as sitting above the pure software level and instead, when we talk about PLM, we're talking about an enterprise-level ideology – a new way of thinking and working that unifies and empowers the three key forces of the modern fashion business: people, products and processes.

Those processes cover everything from trend, concepts, design, development, costing, sourcing to delivery, but it's important when we talk about them to have a single anchor point – an “epicentre” from which PLM's impact on the business will spread, beyond the headquarters to the manufacturers, their partners and ultimately the consumers.

Processes are, as we define them, centred on the one core competency of PLM – the one that drove its initial popularity in the days of PDM – and that is the production of a design & technical specification, or “tech pack”. From there, the breadth and depth of functionality that modern PLM offers has grown in both directions: towards the beginning of the product lifecycle with its support for trend, inspiration, analytics and design; and towards the end, offering tools to support the process of a product being disposed and its effects upon the environment, or by recycling or reuse within the circular economy.

People are another vital aspect of the PLM ideology. As well as representing the essential creativity and spark of a company, only people have the vision to continuously challenge the status-quo – to prompt software vendors and management to ensure that the technological environment they are building is as closely aligned as possible to its human equivalent.

After all, if a PLM project is designed to help the processes of trend, design, development, sourcing, production, logistics, selling and servicing become more efficient, then it must by its very nature include the people responsible for those processes, helping them to work more intelligently and more quickly, and deliver the best possible products with the right technological and ideological support.

PLM, then, is a tool *and* a mindset designed to allow businesses to consider how they can improve the way that they design and bring their products to market. PLM operating alone is not the answer; we look at PLM as the backbone of the business model, that will need to be interfaced to best-of-breed solutions that will use and share the data inputs & outputs, working together as a frictionless solution platform.

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## Where do we begin with PLM?

PLM really is all-encompassing; a PLM project will directly affect each and every one of your team – to a greater extent than you perhaps realise.

So, whether you work in design, development or sourcing, you will find yourself working with PLM, and so understanding more about it will serve you well. But where do you begin to develop that understanding, when PLM covers everything? How do we go about drawing lines in the sand and saying “this is PLM”?

One way to look at it is to focus solely on the development processes, from social media / trend analytics, inspiration through to the end of life of a product. Yes, today’s PLM solutions, in many cases, incorporate social and environmental compliance modules, which cover product disposal.

We stress the point that today’s PLM solutions should, and in most cases do, cover the entire extended value-chain, by which we mean: your retailer/brand, trend sites, fabric mills, material market places, colour prediction sites, vendors, factories, laboratories & testing companies, packaging & labels, etc.

There are far too many instances of companies that purchase a **PLM** solution, only to implement a **PDM** solution.

This might sound confusing, but what we essentially mean is that many adopters of PLM fail to recognise just how far into the product lifecycle and the global supply-value-chain it can go. Sadly, some businesses implement the PLM software for the needs of their local office (usually the production of a tech pack in

PDF format and then use email to share tech-packs) and neglect to go any further – a partial waste of what, for most of them, will be one of their most significant investments.

So, if your business were to implement PLM in its headquarters and not take advantage of cascading the same support strategy and new ways of working to **all** of its value-chain partners, then you are going to leave a great deal of money on the table...

So, regardless of what form your software comes in, (On-premise, Cloud, or a Multi-Tenant platform - which are all different methods of getting the software in the hands of the users, and covered in the ‘PLM Architecture’ document of this pack) in order to understand where to begin with PLM, you need to have a clear strategy that goes beyond the local and extends across the entire value-chain, joining the digital dots along the way.

To begin with PLM: start with what matters most to you, but always, always, always, keep the bigger picture in mind. If we can impress one thing upon you when you’re reading this document, it should be that the limits of PLM are purely artificial. Properly chosen and sensibly implemented, PLM can eventually achieve all of your product lifecycle goals.

You don’t need a ‘big bang’ approach to your PLM strategy and implementation. Far from it, in fact. That’s as much of a recipe for disaster as ignoring half of its potential. Instead, you should consider your entire journey at the very beginning and have a clear understanding of the multiple stop off points (phases/ milestones) along the way.

Although there are certain best practice suggestions, you can begin where it suits you best, but you should always check that you’re still on the right path to achieving your strategic objectives at regular intervals.

We hope that this short document helps to educate those new to a PLM project and acts as a reminder to those that may have taken their eyes off PLM’s true value proposition.





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