

Business Management Systems
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PLM Basics: How Do You Know You Need PLM?



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BMS
BUSINESS MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

330 W.38th Street
Suite 705
New York, NY 10018
(800) 266-4046
info@bmsystems.com
www.bmsystems.com

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The apparel and textile industries are two of the chief implementers of product lifecycle management software in the industry today. In demanding fields such as these, which possess such unique and nuanced needs, PLM helps to streamline business processes and eliminate inconsistencies to create the most efficient and profitable company possible.

This is all well and good for those companies that choose to implement a PLM system—but how do you know if PLM will work for *your* business? And what *is* PLM anyway?

Product lifecycle management software—or PLM—is a software system configured to house and organize all information and data crucial to the various stages of the production of merchandise. Implementing this proven technology helps you to monitor and

streamline the entire lifecycle of your product, from the conception of an idea to the delivery of the finished product, all while facilitating interdepartmental communication to ensure maximum profitability and efficiency with minimum wastage.

Once you develop an understanding of PLM, how do you know if it's for you? As with any major investment, PLM requires a certain level of commitment to make for a successful and lucrative implementation. The decision whether or not to install a PLM system should not be taken lightly.

Before you even begin your decision-making process, take into consideration the following signs that you and your business could benefit from PLM.

1. Communication (Or Lack Thereof) Between Departments is Slowing You Down

The workplace is an intricate web, where the completion of tasks is dependent on the completion of other tasks, in a seemingly never-ending loop. Hours or even days could lapse before an employee realizes that a project

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they've been waiting on is ready to move forward. Add up all of that time and by the end of the year you'll probably have a couple weeks worth of wasted time on your hands.

This lack of communication can also lead to unnecessary recreation of work. When the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing, not surprisingly both hands oftentimes do the same thing, effectively causing a given task to eat up twice as much time as it should.

"It is hard to even fault employees for this," says Karina Kogan, President of PLM provider Business Management Systems. "I would hope that they have more pressing things on their plates to deal with than to constantly be writing memos to coworkers about the status of each individual task they complete. That is why it is so crucial to utilize some kind of mechanized system—whether it be PLM or something else altogether—so that once a task is completed, it is instantly visible to all the right people."

2. Disorganization Makes Locating Data Difficult



Even the tightest-run ship faces difficulties related to lapses in organization. Saving items in multiple locations, having duplicates, making changes without updating the information universally—these are all seemingly negligible mistakes that can really add up when it comes to a company's overall organization.

"Tiny slip-ups can snowball quickly when it comes to organization, even with firmly established procedures in place," says Kogan. "Employees are human. There's no way anyone can be realistically expected to follow procedure to the letter every single time. And when it comes to your business, 99% of the time isn't good enough. That's where PLM can step in."

By both creating and storing all information within one PLM database,

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the hassles of duplicated and/or misplaced documents and incongruous data become a non-issue. Everything is where it should be, and when a piece of information has already been created, it is instantly visible to all the right people and departments.

3. Wasted Time; Processes Are Not As Efficient As They Could Be



It is no secret that time equals money.

Piggybacking on the matter of disorganization, there are many time-wastage issues that can arise from such gaps in organization.

The afore mentioned trap of having items saved in the incorrect location—or even in multiple

locations—can lead to the unnecessary recreation of data, and often to incidents of incongruous information and discrepancies that can cause major setbacks.

“Searching for and recreating data is a major time-waster in the workplace,” says Kogan. “And it shouldn’t be. Once a task is done, it’s done. Going backwards and doing it over again effectively makes the task take twice as long as it should.”

PLM eliminates the need for reworking and extensive searching for data. The information is entered directly into the PLM database, at which point all parties involved will know which holes have been filled and can access said information based on company securities.

Even in an instance when everything is where it should be, reworking is required a lot of standard business processes are innately redundant. A lot of forms and other tasks require the input of information that already exists. PLM pulls from that information automatically inserts any existing data anywhere else it belongs in the system.

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“PLM eliminates the need for rework of any kind,” says Kogan. “Whether it be corrective or part of an established business process. In this day and age, there is no reason to stand for the drudgery of repetitive manual data entry.”

4. Oversampling & Wasted Materials



The apparel world is so fast-paced that sometimes even the train-like momentum of design and production is not fast enough to keep up.

“Say you design a line of a dozen peasant tops,” says Kogan. “And you want to sample them all because peasant tops are projected to be hot this season. But by the time you’ve sourced and purchased all the materials—

possibly even before the samples are constructed—the fashion climate has changed and the peasant tops are no longer in the plan.”

Scenarios like this one can lead to masses of wasted materials, time and labor.

PLM provides the tools a designer needs to create a visual for products before they are created in the physical, allowing you to choose what is in and out on the fly. This way the designer can see which lines have potential prior to sampling, and eliminate irrelevant items in moments, instantly notifying all departments to cease all processes related to that product.

“People sometimes forget that the design and business elements of the apparel industry are not mutually exclusive—they are very much intertwined,” says Kogan. “Expenditures on the design end can get out of control, which ultimately impacts how a company fairs financially in a given year or season. PLM is the technology to keep that in check.”

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5. You Have The Desire to Become the Most Efficient & Profitable Company Possible



By this point, you may be thinking, *Our business is strong; we don't need PLM.*

But choosing to get help from a PLM system doesn't mean admitting defeat.

"If you take a look around the fashion world, most of the biggest names in the industry today are utilizing one kind of software system or another to give them that competitive edge that makes them so successful," says Kogan. "These aren't struggling companies—on the contrary, they are some of the *best* companies who have made wise business decisions to in order to *become* the best."

The numbers don't lie. It may sound corny, but it's true—companies that implement PLM speed their time-to-

market by a minimum of 30% and save thousands of dollars each year on design and production costs.

"With PLM—as they say—the proof is in the pudding," says Kogan. "It's a proven technology. If you are in the position to make the commitment and the investment, the returns you will enjoy will be priceless."



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