



Catalog Management

How leading companies are gaining
strategic advantage over their competitors.

Executive Whitepaper

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INTRODUCTION

With the slow-down in the global economy and pressure to produce bottom-line results, executives are constantly under pressure to find new ways to make their business more efficient and streamlined.

Leading companies are increasingly using catalog management to gain strategic advantage over their competitors

One subject in particular that is increasingly garnering industry interest, is catalog management. Manufacturers, distributors and resellers are realizing that their catalogs are their key strategic weapon to inform, influence and convince buyers to purchase their products. Rich, comprehensive and accurate catalogs provide a means for differentiation in crowded marketplaces where margins are reducing drastically.

This whitepaper highlights the evolution and importance of catalog management, and introduces Apsiva's catalog management solutions; a platform to create rich, consistent and timely catalogs in different media formats

EVOLUTION

Catalogs are becoming more complex, encompassing not only print but multiple electronic forms as well

The mention of the word 'catalogs' immediately conjures up an impression of print catalogs, physical paper that can be touched, thrown around and gives a feeling of substance. Indeed, product catalogs have their beginnings in a printed form. For decades companies have used print catalogs to educate, inform and persuade buyers to purchase their products.

With the advent of the Internet and new-age technologies, electronic catalogs are increasingly being used to complement print catalogs. Posting product information on a web-site allows companies to easily and cost-effectively reach millions of new customers across the globe, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. CD catalogs provide a compromise between print and web catalogs. For example, a travelling salesman can easily showcase products in a face-to-face scenario, without lugging around heavy and clumsy print catalogs or have the need for an Internet connection at each client. In addition, many online exchanges and corporate procurement systems require suppliers to submit their product catalogs in a defined digital format like XML and CIF.

Catalogs in multiple media formats allow companies to reach all potential customers

The evolution of product catalogs from print to multiple electronic formats, has in no way diminished the importance of print catalogs. In fact, many corporate and consumer buyers still prefer the feel and simplicity of a print catalog, ones with rich content and images. In reality, electronic catalogs offer new, and not necessarily alternative, sales channel opportunities.

Catalog management is fast becoming the number one priority for leading companies

The management of multi-media catalogs is the real challenge facing organizations today, and the manner in which these companies address this issue is becoming a clear differentiation between companies who are losing market share, and those that can be termed world-class.

Managing catalogs in multiple media formats without a system, requires different skills sets and is very inefficient.

- Challenges:**
- **Inaccurate data**
 - **Inconsistency**
 - **Inefficient processes**

Catalog product information is core to many initiatives, e.g. e-commerce

Catalog management needs to be supported by a world-class technology platform

There are not many world-class catalog management systems available

THE CATALOG MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE

As new sales channel opportunities have opened up, so too have the intricacies of managing catalogs in a multi-channel and multi-media environment. The systems, skill-sets and resources required to manage a print catalog are different to that for electronic catalogs. Typically, a print catalog is produced by graphical designers using a desktop publishing tool like QuarkXPress, whereas technical skills manipulating HTML, Java or ASP software code as well as relational databases, are required to manipulate digital data for web catalogs.

As a result, many companies foraying into multi-media catalogs establish separate departments or teams to manage their catalogs independently. Processes and systems are focussed on managing a particular catalog for that particular media, and not for the company product information in general.

This approach addresses media-specific catalog requirements. However, since each channel catalog is essentially a representation of the same product information that is managed independently of each other, this creates fundamental problems for the company as a whole. Data cannot be easily updated if there is multiple storage of the same data. Data quickly gets out of sync causing data integrity and brand inconsistency issues across the various catalogs. Regular data updates like seasonal price changes cannot be easily applied across the channels, resulting in process and data inefficiencies.

This is a fundamental reason why many companies have not successfully transgressed into e-commerce. The management of product information and catalogs is not streamlined, centrally managed or scalable, and the resulting representation on the web-site is not compelling or enticing enough for buyers to purchase from. Evidence of this is the enormous shift in interest from front-end procurement to back-end catalog management solutions.

What is required is a fundamental mind shift in the way that catalogs are produced and managed, and this needs to be supported by a platform that automates and controls the catalog data and end-to-end processes, independently of the media format.

COMPONENTS OF A WORLD-CLASS CATALOG MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

There are different technology solutions in the catalog management space. Most address media-specific requirements (e.g. desktop publishing tools), but very few are able to address the holistic issues facing companies with multi-media catalogs.

In general, technology in the catalog management space is still in it's early growth phase. Customer demand for systems that provide real bottom-line value is increasing at a rapid pace and so too will the development of such tools. But for a catalog management system to provide real holistic value, the solution should provide some fundamental functionality and features:

- **Central repository and management** – The system should store the catalog data in a central master repository, independently of each channel or media. The management of catalog product data should move away from a specific media format into a central system. In this way, maximum control over the data integrity can be achieved.
- **Manage products down to granular level** – Rich and comprehensive catalog content can only be created if the products are broken down and managed at a very granular level, i.e. product attribute and parametric level. This can only be achieved if the solution is able to manage product information in a consolidated, yet flexible, classification structure.
- **Standardize and enhance data** – Data can easily become ‘dirty’ if there are multiple users or multiple sources of content. The role of the catalog management system is to ensure consistent standardized data (e.g. descriptions, abbreviations and units of measure) throughout the master repository. In addition, the system should be capable of enhancing the data to make it more findable and to stand out. For example, adding competitor cross-reference or synonym data allows catalog products to be found using alternative means.
- **Seamlessly push to and synchronize between multiple channels** – From the central repository, customized and channel-specific content should be pushed to the particular media format (Web, CD and Print) at the ‘last moment’; once all data changes have occurred and the channel catalog is to be presented to the customer.
- **Repeatable and Automated** – The creation and management of catalogs is not a once-off static task. In today’s fast changing world, product catalogs are quickly outdated due to shortening product life cycles and constantly changing buyer patterns. So, a world-class catalog management system should be capable of managing multiple cycles of a catalog creation or update processes seamlessly and easily on-demand. In this way, the entire catalog management process can be streamlined and optimized to the maximum.

THE APSIVA SOLUTION

Apsiva provides world-class catalog management solutions to help companies create rich, accurate and comprehensive catalogs, quickly and easily. The Apsiva solution comprises of 2 parts:

1. Content Services

Apsiva provides content engineering services, like data digitization and conversion, to transform disparate data from multiple dissimilar formats and unstructured sources (e.g. legacy, paper and spreadsheet) into a central repository of granular content, that can be repurposed and manipulated into many other forms.

In addition, content enrichment (standardize and enhance) services add value to the granular data by reworking it to make it structured according to the company or industry classification, more consistent and more findable.



2. Catalog Management Solutions

Apsiva has developed a number of leading edge catalog management solutions to address the holistic requirements of a company looking to streamline its catalog management process:

An integrated suite of solutions that address:

- *Product Information Management*
- *Print Catalogs*
- *Web Catalogs*
- *CD Catalogs*

- **Apsiva ONEsource** – Manage all aspects of your product information and catalog content in a central repository, and leverage our parametric design that makes it easy to find products. ONEsource is the central database that drives the Print, Web and CD modules.
- **Apsiva Print** – Automate your print production processes. By placing all your product data in ONEsource, we have created a simple method to transfer the data into a publishing software and automate the various steps involved in creating a print catalog.
- **Apsiva Web** – Dynamic and searchable electronic catalog. E-commerce is easy and profitable if your clients, vendors and prospects can easily find the information that they need to make an informed decision.
- **Apsiva CD** – Create a custom catalog on the fly. There is a trend to shorter more targeted catalogs, a CD catalog can be created specifically for a large key account, a targeted niche within your industry or a special promotion that you may be running.

The Apsiva content services and catalog management solutions provide a very strong value proposition for companies looking to optimize their catalog management processes:

Strong value proposition unmatched by any other vendor or product

- Central repository, no duplication of effort or data
- Clean structured data
- Manage all aspects of content from once central system
- Seamlessly deploy to Web, CD and Print
- Automated processes that reduce the reliance on IT
- Searchable & repurposeable content
- Repeatable process

BENEFITS OF THE APSIVA SOLUTION

Apsiva's leading edge solutions provide functionality and features that no other vendor or solution has. The benefits demonstrate real bottom-line advantages and value:

Tangible benefits that add real value to a company's bottom-line

- Reduce operational costs by streamlining the catalog management process
- Increase revenue with catalogs that stand out
- Increase the accuracy of product information in catalogs
- Accelerate time-to-market by rapidly deploying product information
- Produce rich, accurate, up-to-date and relevant catalogs quickly
- Keep content consistent across all sales channels

Companies who use this world-class catalog management solution will be able to use their catalogs to gain significant strategic advantage over their competitors.

APSIVA

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