Intro Message: Welcome to Cognizant podcasts, tailor made for easy listening. We bring you digital trends for busy executives on the go.

Anup Prasad: Hello and welcome to today's episode. I'm Anup Prasad, vice president and market leader for the retail and consumer goods practice here at Cognizant. In today's episode, we'll talk about product information management or PIM and what it means for your brand and for your success in the marketplace. I have with me, Stephanie Wiles, senior director of consulting in our retail and consumer goods practice. And together we're going to discuss and dive into why product information management or PIM is key to your eCommerce success and how we are seeing it evolve in the marketplace among our clients. So, Stephanie welcome. I'm excited to discuss this topic with you, given your wealth of experience in this space.

Stephanie Wiles: Thanks, Anup. Happy to be here. This is one of my favorite topics because it brings together consumer goods companies, and retailers, along with end consumers. Happy to discuss this with you and have been looking forward to it.

Anup Prasad: All right, so let's dive right in. So, in your experience, why do you think consumer goods companies need to invest in a technology like PIM? Especially now.

Stephanie Wiles: Historically consumer goods companies have focused on product innovation. So, what I like to think of is the far left of the process before you get to a PIM. This has left them dependent upon the retail industry for the presentation and representation of product information. This means that there's a gap in the capabilities of CPG companies to manage that finished good piece. Consumer goods companies should see this as an opportunity to control the messaging around their product, where before they weren't doing so. The pandemic has amplified this opportunity by accelerating consumer adoption of online purchasing. PIM solutions support that entire process of collecting validating, enriching, and syndicating product information. We've seen many CPG companies losing market share. That's the other reason. So, we see that they haven't historically done it and there's a need to connect with direct consumers. And finally, they're losing market share and who they are losing market share to? They're losing market share to several smaller, more digitally native companies who grew up with this digital-first mindset. And unfortunately for those companies who are not digitally native, they're still managing product information on spreadsheets. With spreadsheets, there is an enormous challenge to ensure the quality that our end consumers are expecting. So today is the day for those CPG companies to start looking at how they mature and evolve those data management practices around end products.

Anup Prasad: Okay, so effectively what you were saying is post the pandemic, a couple of mega trends have accelerated one that we, you know, talk about all the time, which is this whole direct to consumer trend and CPG trying to

establish that direct consumer relationship and acquire first party data. And the second is the shift in demand itself with some of these smaller companies. I think the demand shift that's happening to private label and big brands. So, both trends mean that the businesses must accelerate their product development life cycle. They must acquire the right product information and render that to their end consumer as they establish that direct relationship. So now that we've established a need for PIM in this space, what have you seen work as far as best practices as some of our clients have tried to embrace PIM as a technology foundation?

Stephanie Wiles: That's a great question, Anup. We know that the first thing we always say is lead with the business, make this a business initiative. It's not an IT led effort. The single biggest reason for failure for PIM initiatives is the failure to engage business partners. We've seen that not only from our experience in consulting and as a system integrator, but also product companies come to us and talk to us about the need to encourage our clients and to make sure that the business is onboard with what we're doing. That might appear on the surface as a technology solution, but it is in fact something that is a business process change.

Anup Prasad: So, the essence of what you're saying is PIM is not just an IT initiative. Business needs to be engaged and embraced early in the process. Now let's unravel that a little bit in the context of our CPG clients. Most of the consumer goods companies that you work with are global companies with, you know, big portfolios or brands. And we've seen that there are silos that exist even inside of a brand across markets and of course, across brands. Given that context, how do you think a PIM helps solve some of those challenges in terms of getting the business onboard, the multiple stakeholders across brands and geos that need to be involved in this PIM journey?

Stephanie Wiles: If you think about these brands, these big global successful brands, that have been managing this information and I would say, I hesitate to use the word immature, but it is quite that honestly, Anup. They've not been able to then leverage that global presence that they truly have. So, what does the system do? It allows them to come together and drive consensus around what the taxonomy should be. How am I going to talk about my products? What are the important attributes of my products and how do I understand those globally? Not just in my market. What can I even learn from other brands and what are they doing? How do I align to a common data quality framework? How do I ensure that I have the right workflow? So how do I know that I'm getting what I need from my R&D, from my supply chain, from my marketing teams, bringing that all together. And a technology driven solution helps me start to have more meaningful conversations around how to bring brands together across geographies. So, I'm no longer just chasing the data, but now the data is there for me-- integrated well with my systems through a workflow and through quality. Now I can have a deeper understanding of how to leverage my products across multiple markets.

Anup Prasad: So, taxonomy, data dictionary, even data governance are some of the key foundational pillars as you embark on this journey, especially in a context like CPG with global brands and global markets.

Stephanie Wiles: Absolutely. When you start to talk about governance, you know, I'm going to get excited because that is such a foundational component of these kinds of solutions. And it's a new concept to many consumer goods companies to talk about who in your organization has the rights to set the standard for products? Because this standard has historically been managed by the brand manager, which might be marketing. Why marketing? We know marketing is the most creative folks within our organization, for sure. What they may be lacking is that data mindset that PIM needs. So, what you're asking folks to do is introduce a new discipline to some of these very creative data sets. And when we're able to bring that creativity with that structured process, we now have the best of both worlds and CPG companies can start to leverage and harness that information in new and exciting ways. And like we said, in the first question you were talking about, they can own the messages for those end consumers.

Anup Prasad: So, we've talked about, you know, the benefits of PIM and why brands need to embrace this. Let's dive a little bit into the use cases from your experience that you've seen play out among our client base as they implement PIM.

Stephanie Wiles: So, there's three primary use cases. We've seen others, but I'll speak to three of those. Operational efficiency is one, and I've hinted at that already. Companies recognize that there's a ton of pressure and I would encourage them to see this as an opportunity as I said, this pressure to respond to consumer needs. And that doesn't just mean getting your product out there but keeping that information fresh and making sure it's accurate. If historically I've done that on spreadsheets, I can't scale that. So, I need to be able to address this demand that consumers have and without exploding the operational costs that might be required, if I'm going to keep that in a very manual set of processes.

Anup Prasad: And if I may interrupt here, Stephanie, how long does it take for you to set up a SKU if you are doing it manually for an online web store?

Stephanie Wiles: We have seen as much as 142 days and that's just too long. If you think about some of these products, I can't waste 142 days manually setting up a product. I need to have, especially some of these products where there's some sort of seasonality to them, or if there's any trends associated with them, I need to shorten that life cycle as quickly as possible.

Anup Prasad: Absolutely. And a PIM helps you do that.

Stephanie Wiles: Absolutely it does. Most definitely does because I'm bringing that information from all those different, what might have been siloed pieces of

my organization, into a common master. Setting a workflow, setting a set of standards. So, it doesn't even get in there unless it's at the right quality. And then automating the syndication of that information as much as possible to my end consumer and those various channels. It doesn't just support end consumers. I've talked a lot today about end consumers, but another use case, the direct consumer to use case is obviously there because we've talked about it and hinted at it. So, companies wanting to set up direct to consumer channels where they might have just had a brand site. Now they're able to have their products and transact products. A PIM also supports your retailers. Many companies are saying I can't manage the different retailer information that's required. If I set up a PIM, it can help me automate that feed as well as, and that global view of products. There are many companies who've embraced PIM as a solution for managing that global view. They want to break down those silos that exist within the companies and leverage products in new and innovative ways. PIM helps them automate that process.

Anup Prasad: That's great. So, we've also seen a lot of talk about sustainability in the marketplace, especially with CPG companies that are focusing and doubling down on their ESG agenda. How do you think that PIM as a platform, which gives you the foundational capabilities along with optimizing and making it more effective operationally, getting you the global view. But does it extend itself to be able to tell stories about your products that advance your sustainability agenda? Have you seen something like that in the marketplace?

Stephanie Wiles: I have. That's probably one of my favorite use cases. I will tell you; it might not be the most common, but I think it was one of the most creative. We talked about owning the messaging to our clients. Sometimes we will see these creative CPG companies who recognize I can bring that most creative messaging around how I am sourcing my products. Consumers want to know that and understand what you're doing in terms of sustainability, what you're doing in terms of recycling. There's a way to bring that product information to your end consumers through a PIM. And we know, and one of the things we proved while we implemented a solution for this one CPG company, was when you tell those messages, you touch the heart of your end consumer and in doing so, you're able to convert consumers to try your brand. And we know that when they try the brand, they have the potential to become a loyalist. So, I think that's probably one of the most creative use cases that I've seen for a PIM solution.

Anup Prasad: So that's fascinating indeed Steph. The sustainability story and the ability that PIM lends itself for our clients to be able to tell that story is just amazing. So, we talked about how PIM companies establish that foundation so they can establish a golden record for products in their business. How about going further than just establishing the base attributes and enriching the product attributes? Because the need for personalization is only going to grow. And the companies that can enrich product attributes and deliver that in their end consumer experience are

clearly going to be the leaders. So how have you seen clients take the journey to the next level in terms of driving product enrichment? Do they have to bring on content service providers and help drive the enrichment agenda? What's your experience in that space?

Stephanie Wiles: That's a great question. We see two different ways that people will approach this. The most mature companies are embracing what I usually call CSPs, but those content service providers, those that are just starting on the PIM journey, what they commonly do is they will put that responsibility on marketing. PIM tools have a workflow. That basic product information that we all know and must have to compare products, that stuff is commonly coming from a number of downstream systems or what I think I earlier said to the left of the product, where products are being created and innovated, that stuff is coming into my PIM through a series of integrations, right? So that enrichment part may be managed internally by marketing, where I'm able to connect to some creative messaging, maybe to companies who are just starting out are doing that. And they're doing that through workflows. So, in other words, here's a new product that I'm triggered as Stephanie if it's part of marketing. It is triggered to add her enrichment details around this product. For companies that no longer want to depend upon internal resources, there's several companies out there that you just referred to (content service providers) who offer many different creative and innovative ways to enrich product information. One of them that comes to mind is what we call spin and spin 360. Those are, those are common ways that companies do that. And you may say what the heck is spin 360? Well, I no longer want just a single image of my product. Many companies still struggle just to get that, but we want to see the entire image of the product. I want to be able to take that product and virtually experience that product in my world. Those are things that some of those content solution providers can do if you are not having that capability in house. Many companies choose not to develop that capability in house, but instead depend on those folks who are the experts.

Anup Prasad: That's insightful indeed, Steph. Not only that you can implement PIM and get the golden record, optimize your time, and make it a lot more efficient as a process to bring product attributes online, you can enrich it as well. We covered a lot of ground today talking about why PIM is essential for our clients, especially CPG companies, as they try to go direct to consumer. We also discussed what you think are some of the best practices in implementing PIM and a few of the most successful use cases we have seen. So let me summarize this conversation for our listeners. Over the past few years, we've seen a lot of buzz about our clients, especially in the retail and consumer goods industry, investing in customer intelligence such as customer 360 and with direct to consumer, we have started to see consumer goods companies invest in customer data platforms. Product intelligence, however, has been an underinvested area traditionally and we've seen retail take the lead where they've tried to transform merchandising capability, bring online and, in-store buyers together. PIM is one of the key enablers in that transformation. We can see with direct to consumer that CPG is also going to start to invest in

product intelligence and PIM capabilities. Because consumers will be looking for personalized cross-channel experiences, as digital penetration remains high, analytics and AI powered product intelligence will be a key differentiator for our clients going forward. And that to me is the key takeaway. On that note, Steph, any concluding remarks from your end?

Stephanie Wiles: I don't think I could say it any better, but I love what you said is, and I would say it like this, the foundation of truly enabling hyper-personal customer messages is first getting my product information where it needs to be. Because you can't just talk to customers. You want to talk to customers about your products. So, it is the marriage of those two pieces of information coming together that enables just what you were talking about.

Anup Prasad: Fantastic. So, with that, this is a wrap for today's episode. Visit *www.cognizant.com* for more details on what Cognizant can offer to help you in your product information journey. Thank you.

Stephanie Wiles: Thanks, Anup.

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