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BEST PRACTICES

When It's Time to Rethink Your PLM

Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) has existed for decades, and you've likely gotten a lot of value from your current PLM system. However, if you're trying to manage modern products with PLM technologies that were developed when the Internet was a new concept, it's worth evaluating how cloud PLM has evolved and whether your current PLM system is still suitable for your changing business and your customers. Or perhaps it's time to upgrade to modern, cloud PLM.

Modern Products and Cloud PLM

The phrase "Product Lifecycle Management" was coined almost twenty years ago, and there were many companies that sprang up in the 90s, including Agile Software, Bom.com and MatrixOne, to manage CAD files, hardware changes and manufacturing updates. Fast forward to today and a lot has happened since then – the iPhone, hybrid cars, Facebook, and the cloud – but PLM hasn't really changed. However, the process for developing and launching products is dramatically different:

- **Higher customer expectations:** Mobile apps, eCommerce and next-day delivery have transformed what customers expect from companies.

- **Multi-channel distribution and sales:** Thanks to the success of PLM systems, many companies have done a great job of transitioning products from engineering to manufacturing. However, launching products with multiple partners has become a major issue. Getting sales, marketing, channels and service partners up to speed on the latest product updates – and coordinating all their activities, such as updating sales tools, service instructions, and partner certification – has remained isolated from the product development process.

- **Internet of Things (IoT):** IoT offers companies great opportunities but also great challenges. Many IoT products now have multiple multiple systems, partner products and software packages. Connected products also provide constant feedback and customer usage data. However, many PLM systems are unable to manage non-hardware data.

- **Cloud platforms:** The cloud has helped companies streamline how internal and external stakeholders can collaborate on product development and launch. Of course, cloud apps help lower overhead and IT costs. But they have a much bigger impact on product success. Having a single cohesive platform for threaded discussions, mobile support, point-and-click administration can dramatically help how people work with each other to launch products into the marketplace.

Propel helps everyone easily see the impact of product changes to customers, partners and channels – all on the world's most robust and flexible business cloud platform.

Propel – a Fresh Approach to PLM

Propel was started by PLM and development veterans, who spent the last several years working with the latest cloud technologies. While most PLM companies have focused on designing hardware and handing changes off to manufacturing, the Propel team realized that there was still a huge gap translating product updates into customer adoption and market success.

Propel's approach to PLM is to focus on getting product updates into the hands of people who care about them the most – your customers.

If you deal with a complex network of products, services, channels and customers, Propel can help you intelligently roll out all types of product changes to your employees, partners and customers. Propel helps you collaborate on all types of product updates, so everyone will love you and your products.

Continuing to run your current PLM systems and processes will work for a while, especially if your business isn't changing much. However, if you're already dealing with more software content in your products, more partners and more related customer data, Propel can make a difference.

Customer and Product Insights

Any time you make a product change, it's critical to know what the impact is in the field. You probably have your PLM integrated to your ERP, so you should have a good idea of the impact to inventory, but what about the impact to your customers? If you release an ECO, do you know which customers are affected? Unfortunately, there is probably no integration between your PLM and CRM.

On the other hand, Propel is seamlessly integrated to Salesforce, making it easy to track the relationship between customers, product revisions, and partners, so you can take appropriate action. When you update a product, you can instantly see which customers, service partners and channels are impacted. And as you go through the product development process, you can also see how your product pipeline is shaping up and whether you're on target to meet your revenue goals.

All Product Content

Many companies use their PLM system only to manage hardware and manufacturer parts, mainly because of the pre-defined nature of the item lifecycle stages. Basically, all items have to go through the same lifecycle stages – Preliminary, Prototype, Pilot, Production, Inactive, Obsolete. This makes sense for hardware, but not for software, sales content, etc.

Propel's flexible lifecycles allow you to manage all types of product content uniquely. Software can go through stages like Test, Alpha, Beta and Released, while Collateral and Specifications can go through stages like Draft, Approved, and Obsolete. Also, depending on the lifecycle phase, you can define how open or controlled you want the change process to be. Items in an Initial stage can be changed without any approval process, whereas a Datasheet in the Approved stage requires a revision change if a specific field needs to be updated.

Tasks and Reminders

When you're doing a product change, you likely want to have some follow-up tasks, like doing a cost-impact analysis or pricing update. Your PLM system may offer project management features, but it may not be integrated to product changes.

Propel allows you to create tasks, assign them to team members, and relate them to engineering changes, parts, manufacturer parts, customers, files, etc. You can also set up reminders and due dates, so you can make sure they get completed.
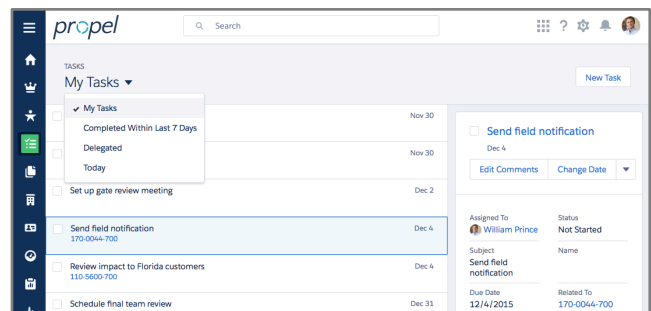
Tasks and reminders can be associated to engineering changes, parts, files, or anything – so you can be sure your team stays on top of things.

Run Your Business from Anywhere

Being able to review, update, and change product information shouldn't force you to be married to your laptop. Most PLM systems allow you to review and approve changes from your mobile device, but they're limited to those capabilities. Creating items and BOMs, editing dashboards, or running reports isn't possible.

On the other hand, Propel lets you do everything on any device, any browser, and any operating system. You can drill into dashboards, do Where Used, and view threaded discussions – all on your phone, and all without having to buy additional modules.

Rapid and Cohesive Innovation

Your PLM vendor may provide a broad product portfolios. However, sometimes getting all the different products to all work together across multiple product versions and different development teams can be challenging.

Propel is a consistent, cohesive and integrated solution that just works from the get-go. Capabilities like reporting, social collaboration, mobile, workflows, and tasks are standard features that don't require a complex scoping exercise. And because Propel is built on the robust Salesforce platform, the company can focus on building out business innovation, rather than building out platform features.

Focus on the Customer

Your PLM provides solid capabilities for managing product information, and it will likely offer more integration with Supply Chain Management, CAD or ERP, so you can have a deeper view of hardware and manufacturing data.

Propel's core capabilities for managing product information and changes are very similar to your PLM, but the focus is on delivering all types of product updates to everyone who touches your products – sales, channels, partners and customers. And because of the integration with Salesforce, future innovations will continue deepening the support for customer-facing processes.
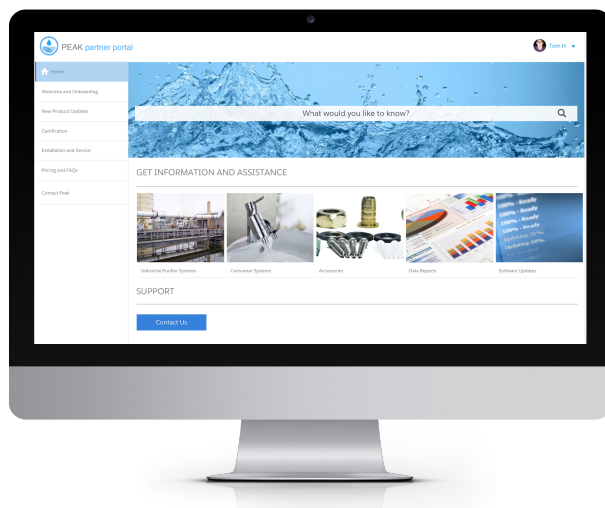
Propel offers rapid innovation – including customer communities, social collaboration, and executive dashboards – to help customers, channels and partners get engaged with your product updates.

Next Steps for Your PLM

PLM has always been a solid product for helping manufacturing companies manage product changes. But as the decades-old technology becomes more dated, it may be worth considering a fresh approach if:

- You want to understand the impact of product changes on customers, partners and channels

- Software and customer data are becoming a bigger part of your products

- You need to manage changes to other product information besides hardware and parts

- You need greater flexibility to manage other customer-facing processes

- Multiple partners are involved in the sales and service of your products

- You need an easy out-of-the-box solution versus integrating multiple applications

- You're looking for a company that delivers frequent and rapid innovation

To find out more about Propel, watch a guided interactive demo at **www.propelPLM.com**.

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Built 100% on Salesforce, Propel offers cloud PLM that helps your company, partners and customers manage changing product information. Learn more at **propelPLM.com**

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