

Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands unleashes potential of building supplies data with Informatica PIM



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Ron Kessels, Deputy Director of E-Business, Saint-Gobain Distribution, The Netherlands

Innovating Solutions in the Building and Construction Markets

Saint-Gobain is a world leader in the building and construction markets. The \$59.4 billion company designs, manufactures and distributes building materials, providing innovative solutions to the challenges of growth, energy efficiency and environmental protection. Innovation is the key word here: ideas such as self-cleaning windows and smart insulation systems are testimony to the way the company is making homes more comfortable, cost-efficient and sustainable worldwide.

Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands can enjoy significant competitive advantage by giving customers reliable, consistent and complete insight into the characteristics of the products they are buying. Details about the size and colour of bathroom tiles, for example, or the strength and weight of a steel bracket can help the buyer compare one brand with another

and make an informed product choice more quickly.

However, the Dutch company was struggling to deliver that accurate, detailed and up-to-the-minute product insight. Information on 150,000 products and more than 2,000 suppliers was derived from a variety of different formats, such as spread sheets and pdf files, and warranting reliable product information was difficult. There were multiple descriptions and different, overlapping product codes for the same product.

At every customer touch point, the ready availability of this product information has a profound effect on buying decisions, and if customers couldn't decide whether the Saint-Gobain product was what they were looking for, they would not complete the purchase. Worse still, they might switch to a competitor.

Ron Kessels, deputy director of E-Business at Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands encapsulates the problem neatly, using a shoe as an



Overview

Leading European building supplies company deploys PIM solution to increase revenues, customer satisfaction and loyalty through more consistent product information across all sales channels.

Business Need

- Grow market share and revenues in building and construction supplies
- Deliver seamlessly integrated and rewarding multichannel customer experience
- Bring products to market faster

example. "What is a product?" he asks, while holding up a worker's shoe. "Is it a De Greef Grisport shoe S3 703 Black? Is it a De Greef Grisport shoe S3 703 Black Size 43? Is it a De Greef Grisport shoe S3 703 Black Size 43 bought from Supplier Y? Or is it a Box with 12 pairs of De Greef Grisport shoes S3 703 Black Size 43 bought from Supplier Y? Of course we need agreed definitions. But the truth is: there is no single answer. It's all true."

It took a new online service to spark the change to a single source of the truth. The service is designed to enable construction workers and other customers to review and order Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands products online, including from their mobile device if they choose. If a single, trusted version of product information could be introduced here, it could subsequently populate other sources of product information, including the intranet, the different websites belonging to each business unit, mobile apps, calculation tools used by customers and the company's enterprise resource planning (ERP) system.

Unleashing Information Potential

The answer lay in a product information management (PIM) solution from Informatica. Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands is using this next generation PIM solution to introduce a high quality, authoritative view of its entire product portfolio (together with products provided by suppliers) and the relationships between them. This means customers can now compare products from supplier A with supplier B on exactly the same attributes—and make their buying decision more quickly and with a greater degree of confidence.

That single view is also common across whichever channel the customer uses to transact with Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands: the Web, on the phone, in store or on their mobile. They can filter on different product specifications.

And once they have found the right product, Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands can offer personalized product recommendations to exploit cross-sell and up-sell opportunities.

For example, if a customer is browsing for a new bathroom sink, the Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands website will recommend alternative plumbing solutions, or taps to suit the basin. Customers can then put the items in their shopping basket and either check if the items are in stock at their local branch, or get them delivered to their home or directly to the building site.

According to Kessels, unleashing product information is also unleashing sales growth. "By enabling customers to access reliable product information in an easy-to-consume format, Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands is increasing sales conversion rates and lowering return rates. Moreover, the company is uniquely positioned to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty through more consistent product information across all sales channels—including mobile devices."

The company's 200-strong Inside Sales team also rely on the single version of the truth powered by Informatica to drive sales success. Previously, when customers contacted the company with a product inquiry, the team used to search through supplier catalogs to respond to these questions. Now they can browse the online catalog and reach the answer more quickly. That's good for customer service and sales revenues.

Challenges

- Data on 150,000 products and more than 2,000 suppliers derived from suppliers in a variety of different formats, such as spread sheets and pdf files
- Struggle to warrant reliable product information was difficult
- Multiple descriptions and different, overlapping product codes for the same product

Solution

Deployed Informatica PIM solution to introduce a high quality, authoritative view of entire product portfolio and the relationships between them.

Impact

- Reduced time needed to upload a product to the website from one week to the same day
- Supported 'long tail' strategy, supplementing 150,000 products with almost one million additional ones from suppliers
- Lowered time needed to prepare customer quote by two-thirds, from one hour to 20 minutes

Nuts & Bolts

- Product: Informatica PIM
- Sources: 2,000 suppliers and 150,000 products
- Target: PIM environment

Kessels also has valuable insights into how Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands views the combination of the PIM solution and its ERP system. In his opinion, the ERP system does not offer sufficient functionality:

“Informatica PIM provides a user-friendly, straightforward and efficient environment for managing, maintaining and enriching product information. ERP systems are not designed to do that. We chose to incorporate all products available in the market in our PIM system, while our ERP system only incorporates the products in our primary assortment. Moreover, many aspects of the product data stored in the PIM system are not necessary for the ERP processes.”

The Results

By introducing the Informatica PIM solution, Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands has reduced the time needed to upload a product to the website from one week to the same day. This increased agility supports increased sales success and customer satisfaction. The solution also supports Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands’ ‘long tail’ strategy to sell small volumes of hard-to-find items to many customers, instead of only selling large volumes of a reduced

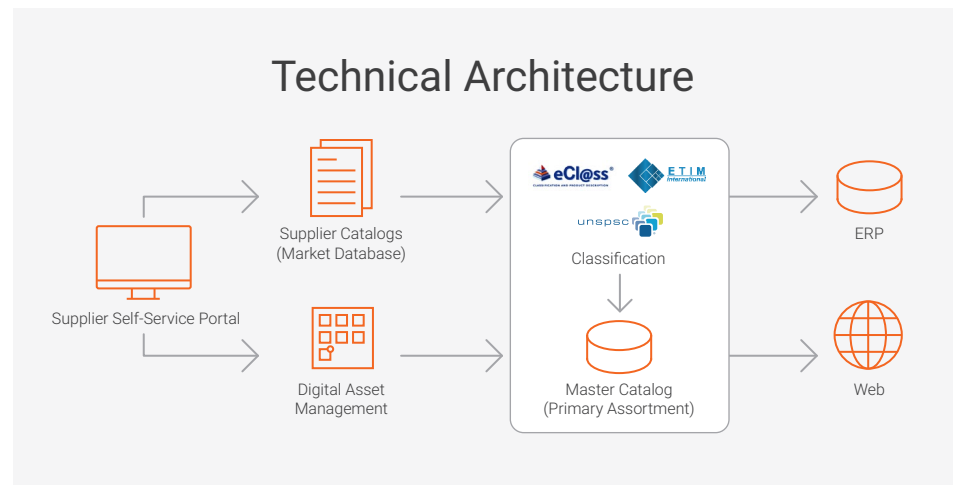
number of popular items. That means the company is able to supplement its 150,000 products with almost one million additional ones from suppliers.

The innovative approach to product management also ensures customers receive more agile and rewarding service. Previously when a sanitary ware supplier was selling a bathroom in store, it took them up to an hour to prepare the quote.

Now, with product information centrally managed and the company able to advise on complementary products, that quote can be prepared in 20 minutes, saving 40 minutes of time. The end-to-end quoting process is quicker, more accurate, contains less faults, more satisfying—and potentially more lucrative to Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands.

The Role of Informatica

“Choosing Informatica was very simple,” says Kessels. “Almost 90 percent of our requirements were available out of the box within the information PIM solution. This gold-standard for PIM gives us one database, and in that database is the truth. From that database we fill all other systems. Informatica PIM undoubtedly helps Saint-Gobain Distribution the Netherlands bring solutions to market more quickly, while playing a vital role in growing sales.”



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