Tech-Clarity

Tech-Clarity Insight:

Managing Design Data with SharePoint

Improving Product Design and Development using Low Overhead Collaboration Infrastructure
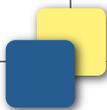
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*This summary is an abbreviated version of the report and does not contain the full content. A link to download the full report is available on the Tech-Clarity website, www.tech-clarity.com.

If you have difficulty obtaining a copy of the report, please contact the author at jim.brown@tech-clarity.com.

Executive Overview

Tech-Clarity research shows that effectively managing design data offers tangible business value. It helps manufacturers grow their business, respond rapidly to market changes, and control cost to improve profitability. Data management does this by helping companies better control, access, and share their designs and related product information. Unfortunately, data management solutions have been out of reach for some companies due to cost and lack of IT resources, forcing them to rely on less effective approaches like storing data on shared drives and folders. These unmanaged approaches are risky and lead to inefficiency and errors, often relying on designers to follow confusing naming standards and file storage processes.

One alternative to an unmanaged environment is to use a collaboration and document management platform such as Microsoft SharePoint to manage designs. This helps organize files and make information easier for designers to access. SharePoint is an attractive collaboration platform for manufacturers because it has a very low total cost of ownership (TCO), leverages existing investments, and requires very little user training.

Although SharePoint offers some level of control and collaboration, it does not natively support the complexity of product development and engineering data. But SharePoint is more than a tool. It is designed as a development platform that can be extended for special needs like engineering. Software vendors with expertise in product development and engineering have taken advantage of this, extending SharePoint to handle the unique needs of managing CAD files and their complex relationships.

SharePoint-based solutions can offer the best of both worlds by combining the business value of better design data management with lower cost and less demand for IT resources.

SharePoint-based design management solutions allow engineers to simplify data management so they can focus on designing products. They help designers view and make sense of the relationships between CAD files, specifications, BOMs, and other product-related information. "*With our SharePoint-based design management system we clearly see the links and inter-relationships between all of our designs and parts, we have more clarity, and it's easier to see where things are used and the effect of design changes,*" says Theodore Turner of Theebo Tech, "*We can see the whole ball of twine.*"

Although they may not offer all of the advanced capabilities and scalability found in purpose-built PDM/PLM systems, SharePoint-based solutions can offer the best of both worlds by combining the business value of better design data management with lower cost and less demand for IT resources.

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Conclusion

Most manufacturers' design management needs focus on the basic requirements to effectively control, access and share data. "*We are very happy if we can simply share, reuse, open, and close files across our three different offices*," concludes Marc Boom of Eurotech. "*Now we can use a single server for offices across multiple countries and work on one data set without having to send files back and forth.*"

Manufactures can reap significant data management benefits from SharePoint-based solutions that offer low cost and less demand for IT resources.

These needs can now be met by leveraging the low-cost, less resource-intensive, easy to use capabilities of SharePoint. Although SharePoint does not offer all of the advanced capabilities found in a full PLM solution, the more comprehensive PDM/PLM packages may be out of reach and potentially overkill for some. Now that engineering and design software vendors have extended SharePoint with product-development related capabilities, a visual context, and relationship management, manufactures can reap significant design data management benefits from SharePoint-based solutions that offer low cost and less demand for IT resources.

Recommendations

Based on industry experience and research for this report, Tech-Clarity offers the following recommendations:

- Manage design data to control, access, and share information and improve business performance
- Simplify data management with a managed environment that allows designers to spend less time searching for data and focus instead on developing products
- Look to SharePoint for a low overhead, easy to deploy collaboration platform
- Take advantage of PLM vendors' investments in SharePoint-based applications that help manage design projects and visualize complex relationships between design data

About the Author

Jim Brown is the President of Tech-Clarity, an independent research and consulting firm that specializes in analyzing the business value of software technology and services. Jim has over 20 years of experience in software for the manufacturing industries. He has a broad background including roles in industry, management consulting, the software industry, and research. His experience spans enterprise applications including PLM, ERP, quality management, service lifecycle management, manufacturing, supply chain management, and more. Jim is passionate about improving product innovation, product development, and engineering performance through the use of software technology.

Jim is an experienced researcher, author, and public speaker and enjoys the opportunity to speak at conferences or anywhere he can engage with people with a passion to improve business performance through software technology.

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