

WHAT IS PLM END GAME?

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I often hear the statement, “Product Lifecycle Management is a journey.” Once you start a PLM journey in your company, it never stops. It encompasses business strategy, product development process, information models, document management, product data management, and many other elements of product lifecycle management necessary to ensure the success of your product development and manufacturing business. While this notion of PLM business systems being an ongoing journey is philosophically sound, it doesn’t always resonate with businesses focused on achieving specific goals and milestones. This raises a crucial question: is there an end game for PLM?

For many companies, I’ve seen the idea of selection of the “best PLM” was dominant for the last decade. PLM was considered as substantial and significant decision. So, you need to have a strategy to choose the right product lifecycle management (PLM). Companies are slow to make those decisions. It is becoming a long process and eventually leads to the process of “best PLM software selection” that should be aligned with the pick of PLM strategy. In my earlier article – [Breaking Free from Monolithic PLM: Building an Agile Strategy with Focused Services](#), I discussed how modern PLM software is becoming a set of agile interconnected services. Check this out.

One size doesn’t fit all in PLM. At the same time, companies always look for some rules and guidance how to select PLM solutions that can be helpful. Today, I want to explore what a 10-year end game for PLM development could look like across three different types of organizations: (1) a startup company, (2) a growing manufacturing business, and (3) a service organization. Each of these organizations operates differently and presents unique perspectives on PLM development. The focus here is on why an information strategy is more critical than simply choosing the “best PLM.”

IS THERE A PLM END GAME?

In discussing the PLM end game, it’s essential to consider the long-term goals and evolving needs of an organization. The idea of a “journey” suggests a continuous process with no clear end, but businesses need more than just a perpetual motion machine—they need concrete achievements and results that drive their success. Therefore, rather than viewing PLM as an endless journey, it’s more practical to think about it in terms of strategic milestones and outcomes that can be planned for and realized over time.

A STARTUP COMPANY: NAVIGATING NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT (NPD)

For a startup, the primary objective is to bring a new product to market and turn it into a viable business. In PLM terms, this process is known as New Product Development (NPD). Startups operate in highly dynamic environments where speed, flexibility, and risk management are paramount. The ability to quickly develop, test, and iterate on products is a key competitive advantage.

WHY INFORMATION STRATEGY MATTERS FOR STARTUPS

Startups typically face significant constraints, whether in terms of capital, personnel, or time. While it might be tempting to invest in what is marketed as the “best PLM” system, such an approach can be risky. Traditional PLM systems are often complex, requiring extensive time and resources to implement, which can bog down a startup’s agile operations.

Instead, startups should focus on developing a lean, scalable information strategy that supports their immediate and long-term needs. This means adopting a PLM approach that is modular, cloud-native, and capable of growing with the company. The focus should be on integrating only the tools and processes that are essential for fast product development and risk mitigation. By prioritizing flexibility and adaptability in their information strategy, startups can stay lean, pivot quickly when necessary, and accelerate their time-to-market.

A GROWING MANUFACTURING BUSINESS: ALIGNING INFORMATION STRATEGY WITH BUSINESS EXPANSION

As a manufacturing business grows, its needs become more complex. The focus shifts from mere survival and market entry to optimizing operations, scaling production, and managing increasing levels of data and complexity. The primary goals at this stage are to increase revenue, reduce costs, and mitigate risks, all while maintaining or improving product quality.

WHY INFORMATION STRATEGY MATTERS FOR GROWING MANUFACTURERS

For growing manufacturing businesses, the right information strategy is crucial to building a robust foundation that supports scalability. While selecting a “best PLM” solution might seem like the logical next step, this approach can be limiting. Traditional PLM systems often come with a large set of predefined modules and pre-tuned processes. This rigid structures that might not align with the evolving needs of a growing business.

Instead, an information strategy that prioritizes data as a critical business asset should be the focus. This strategy involves creating an information architecture that is both scalable and adaptable, allowing the business to integrate new technologies, processes, and tools as needed. By aligning the PLM strategy with the business model, companies can ensure that their data flows seamlessly across all departments—from engineering to manufacturing, supply chain management, and beyond. This holistic approach helps in reducing operational silos, improving decision-making, and driving overall business growth. Flexibility of information models combined with modern AI architecture and machine learning are absolutely critical.

A SERVICE ORGANIZATION: ENHANCING PROJECT EFFICIENCY AND PROFITABILITY

Service organizations, particularly those in engineering or manufacturing, operate on a project basis. Each project is unique, and profitability depends on delivering high-quality work within budget and on time. The challenge for service organizations is to manage multiple projects efficiently, even when they are not interconnected.

WHY INFORMATION STRATEGY MATTERS FOR SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

For service organizations, the traditional concept of a “best PLM” might not fit well. These businesses need tools that are flexible and capable of supporting a wide range of projects with different requirements. A rigid, one-size-fits-all PLM solution can hinder rather than help by imposing unnecessary complexity and constraints.

An effective information strategy for service organizations should focus on supporting the project lifecycle from start to finish. This includes tools for managing project data, facilitating collaboration with clients, and ensuring that each project is profitable. The information strategy should be flexible enough to adapt to the varying demands of different projects while providing a consistent framework for data management and communication. By focusing on data-driven project management, service organizations can improve efficiency, reduce errors, and enhance customer satisfaction—all of which contribute to profitability.

WHAT IS COMMON BETWEEN THESE THREE USE CASES?

Despite their differences, all three scenarios—startups, growing manufacturing businesses, and service organizations—share a common need: a robust information strategy that supports their specific goals. This strategy should prioritize data over documents, enabling organizations to move from static, document-based processes to dynamic, data-driven workflows. In the long term, such an approach can pave the way for advanced technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), which can further enhance organizational performance and drive innovation.

WHAT IS MY CONCLUSION?

The real PLM end game is a product data strategy. In the past, selecting the “best PLM” system might have been seen as the end game. To “buy from IBM” could have been considered as an “end game” as well. Once a company chose a platform, it could rely on that system to manage its product lifecycle for years. However, in today’s fast-paced business environment, this approach is no longer sufficient. The real end game is not about finding the “best PLM,” but about setting up a flexible, scalable data management and information strategy that can evolve with your business.

Data has become the critical differentiator in organizational performance. Companies that focus on building a strong information strategy—one that is adaptable, data-centric, and aligned with their business goals—will be better positioned to succeed in the long run. So, if you’re still searching for the “best PLM,” it might be time to rethink your approach. The future belongs to those who prioritize data and strategy over tools and systems.

Just my thoughts...

Best,
Oleg

Disclaimer: I’m the co-founder and CEO of [OpenBOM](#), a digital-thread platform providing cloud-native PDM, PLM, and ERP capabilities. With extensive experience in federated CAD-PDM and PLM architecture, I’m advocates for agile, open product models and cloud technologies in manufacturing. My opinion can be unintentionally biased.

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