When is the best time to implement PLM?

**Answer:** It depends!

**Advice:** Ideally, you’ll want to align your PLM implementation roll-out with the kick-off of a new season or new program for the product development cycle, but this is easier said than done. While there are many different factors that can influence the best time to implement PLM, start by establishing the best time to roll-out new PLM functionality in production, which will help set a timeline for when to start the implementation. The best time to roll-out new PLM processes and systems largely depends on the business calendar for product development and launch. If you have more than one brand, division or department that will use PLM, the roll-out plan should account for each impacted area.

We recommend first defining a phased roadmap for implementation (taking into account various business calendar milestones instead of a big-bang approach) and then defining a pilot and roll-out plan for each implementation phase to promote better training, increase user adoption, and minimize the impact on business.
Can’t my IT department just “install” the PLM solution? Do we really have to “implement” it?

**Answer:** Well, the short answer is No! “Installation” of PLM doesn’t work. In fact, the “implementation” of PLM is not that effective either without understanding the big picture. PLM, if done right, will transform your organization by driving business process improvements enabled by the best-in-class technology solutions.

**Advice:** The true power of PLM is unleashed when organizations treat it as a transformational process that drives efficiencies across an integrated supply chain, supported by best in class software. To accomplish this goal, the business stakeholders need to have a clear understanding of your company’s specific merchandising and product development requirements and drive the initiative with support from IT. Watch out for vendors that push you straight to the license purchase or for “quick / express implementations.” Instead, you’ll want to validate the technology before you buy it. Make sure it works for your specific needs and that you have a feasible implementation plan.

Unfortunately, it’s not uncommon for companies to spend time and resources to quickly jump on a PLM implementation without clearly defining how it will drive business process efficiencies and how business users will adopt it. However, more leaders are realizing today that PLM is not just an IT initiative to better manage product data. Companies that define a PLM strategy and roadmap first, before getting into PLM selection and implementation, are more likely to maximize benefits.

How quickly can we realize the benefits from PLM implementation? How do we make sure that our product development schedule and holiday/seasonal milestones are not impacted by our PLM project?

**Answer:** If done right, PLM implementations do take time, and thus should not be treated as a quick fix. That being said, the implementation cycle for PLM is much shorter compared to other enterprise implementations like ERP. Effective PLM implementation planning with close collaboration between your business and IT teams can ensure that the implementation doesn’t adversely impact your business milestones and deliveries.

**Advice:** We recommend implementing PLM in phases instead of going for a big bang approach. Using this approach drives a better solution design and a faster adoption by business users, who can start using the system sooner and realizing benefits without waiting for extended implementation cycles. This “crawl, walk, run” approach drives maximum dividends for PLM implementations, and helps in managing the implementation around key business milestones. Again, define a PLM roadmap for your organization that addresses these specific milestones before you start the first phase of your PLM transformation.
My company has a lot of data... and more data, residing in legacy systems, network drives, local desktops, cabinets and enterprise wide ERP tools. How will that work with the new PLM solution?

**Answer:** Having a lot of data is inevitable in today’s global world. The power of online retailing has led to even more complex data management needs. However, it is not the volume of data that creates problems; it is not having structured and organized data that causes data integrity issues, resulting in duplicated efforts and causing a reduction in the efficiency and productivity of your workforce.

**Advice:** A key aspect of a PLM implementation is to clearly identify a system of record for various data elements and put some governance around data quality and usage. Effective master data management is becoming more and more critical for today’s industry leaders and the data residing in the PLM system becomes a key component of the overall master data management strategy for the company. The PLM implementation may mean phasing out some of your legacy systems, getting rid of network drives, and bringing the product development data into the PLM system. Keep in mind that PLM is not a process that occurs in isolation. When selecting your solution and planning your implementation, consider what kind of integrations you’ll need to accomplish seamless data migration and master data management.

As a project sponsor, how do I convince our designers and developers that their creative process and freedom in development won’t get stifled by a new system?

**Answer:** Involve them early and often. Don’t treat PLM as a “system.” Communicate that PLM will help to eliminate non-value added activities and harmonize business processes, leaving more time for designers during the product development cycle to do what they do best – creative design.

**Advice:** PLM is already implemented in numerous prominent retailers and leading fashion and apparel manufacturers. With proper education and involvement of your creative workforce in the process design of your PLM system, you can get over this hurdle. What’s important is that you consider how the PLM implementation may affect the people in your organization, and make a plan for it. PLM transformations generally need organizational change management (OCM). The level of OCM effort will vary based on the size and type of your organization; however, big or small, change management is an important part of successful PLM implementation as it has a big impact on your creative workforce.

Asking these questions upfront, before you go into the selection phase of your PLM initiative is key in designing the right solution for your business. PLM can be a transformational process for your entire organization, and taking the time to think through your specific needs from selection through implementation is instrumental to a successful roll out. Still uncertain? Talk to PLM thought leaders who can help you define what a successful PLM solution looks like for you.