

## A Practical Guide to Organizing Product Content to Create Relevant E-Mails

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If you've committed yourself to sending your customers targeted e-mails using dynamically published content, congratulations! You are on your way to differentiating your brand, increasing sales, and retaining your best customers.

By now you have likely invested in data analysis and segmentation to understand how to target your customers. However, you may still be wondering how this is all going to come together. After all, in order to send messages with relevant content, you need to develop the content itself.

Retail, travel, catalog, and even B2B marketers are learning that product content is the bottleneck in their dynamically published messaging. These marketers are struggling not only with how to justify the potential increase in time and effort associated with producing and managing a product database ("product" refers to any merchandise or service a company offers), but specifically how to organize the content and then make it actionable.

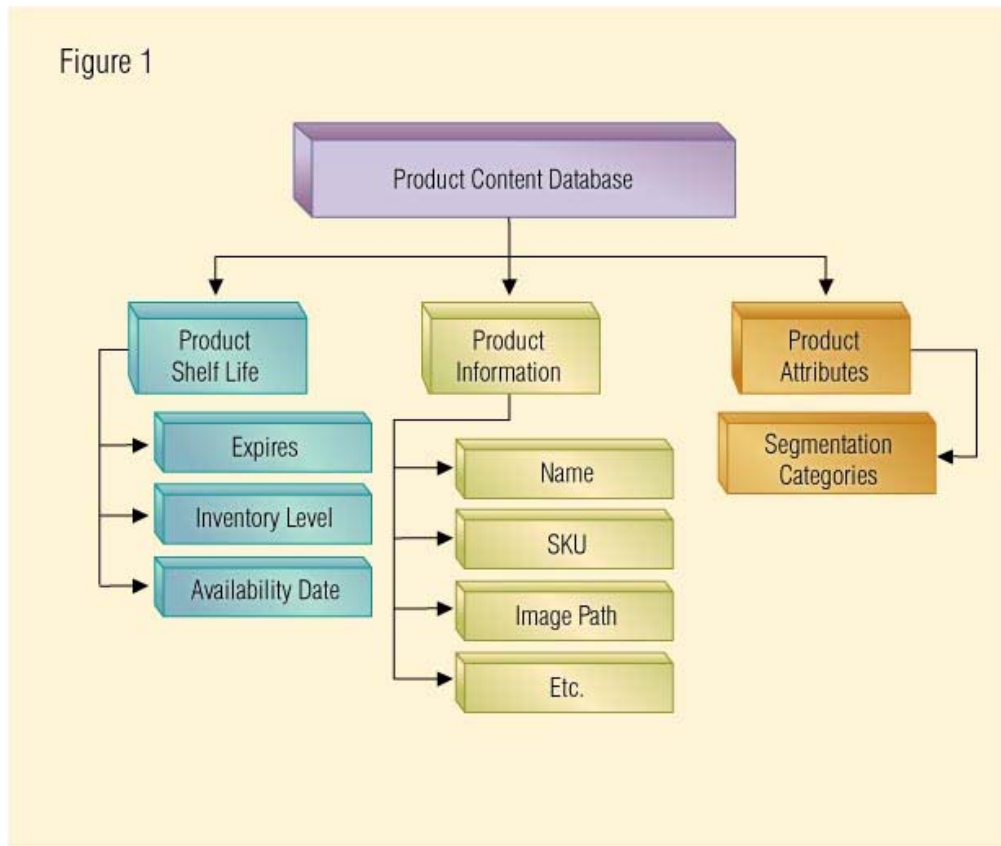
### Organizing Product Content

Figuring out how to organize your product content is the first step toward solving this puzzle. To begin, we need to break down the problem into the two primary questions marketers must ask: What are the components of your product(s)? and, Where do all the elements that make up the product components live?

Figure 1 shows product content components that marketers need to identify:

- **Product Information**—SKU, price, image, description, and so on
- **Shelf Life**—The amount of time it takes for a product to expire, or when a product is to become available (e.g., in the travel industry, airfare sales have a very short life span, whereas the life span of retail products may vary according to season, availability, or inventory level)
- **Product Attributes**—The lifestyle(s) associated with the product (e.g., is it for the tween, genX, or baby boomer market?)

Figure 1



## Product Information

Each product component consists of unique identifying elements. For example, product information could be made up of the following elements: name, SKU, category, price, e-mail-ready image path, page URL, etc. For marketers, gathering and organizing this content is all-important, because they need it to custom publish the necessary products into their e-mail template and to track responses for further learning and segmentation (see figure 2). Much of this product information already exists, and it is up to you to extract it from various sources within your organization—IT, merchandising, supply chain management, marketing, etc.

We recommend you meet with each department to acquire this information, and also make sure your e-mail service provider (ESP) is involved—especially if it will be acting as your content repository.

In the example below a marketing manager for a clothing retailer determines the product information elements she needs to custom publish the next e-mail campaign. ([Click here](#) to get a downloadable version of the Product Information Requirements and Ownership spreadsheet.)

Figure 2: Product Information Requirements & Ownership

Element	Required	Available	Owner
Name	x	x	Merchandising
SKU	x	-	Merchandising
Category	x	x	Merchandising
Image Path - e-mail-Ready	x	-	Creative team
Product URL Page	x	x	Web Team
Price	x	x	Merchandising
Product Abstract for e-Mail	x	-	Creative team
Release Date	x	x	Merchandising
Expiration Date	x	x	Merchandising
Discount Status	x	x	Merchandising
Inventory Count	x	x	Supply Chain/IT

### Product Shelf Life

Product shelf life determines the storage capacity and frequency with which product data is updated and retrieved. One example is expiration date. This could be real-time/time-sensitive information (e.g., airline-fare sales), month-long (e.g., event-specific or seasonal merchandise such as NCAA basketball or a clothing retailer), or indefinite (e.g., items that are continually manufactured, creating a constant supply, such as best-selling/classic books and music). Depending on your business, you may have one or many shelf-life categories. Below is a list of three categories we have identified and recommend that marketers use in organizing their products:

1. Expiration Date
2. Inventory Level
3. Availability Date

## Product Attributes

Product attributes are an essential factor in publishing highly customized, relevant messages. This component allows you to tie a specific product or group of products to specific audience segments you have identified. For example, if your customer has a time-share on an island, and through segmentation analysis you have discovered that he only wants to know about other time shares that are offered on islands, this customer may be in what you call the “islander” segment, and therefore will only see products that fit the attribute of being an “island” product.

Marketers should look to their analytic team for assistance defining product attributes. Most likely, if you have done your segmentation up front, you should be able to map products to various segments and thus define your product attributes.

## Making Your Product Data Set Actionable

Now you’ve gathered all your product information from various internal departments, have assigned product attributes, and have categorized your product content data into shelf-life categories. All these efforts combined will allow you to create highly customized and relevant messages to your customer...and over time will save you valuable time and money, thereby justifying any upfront costs.

You have solved the first part of the puzzle—organized all of your product content—but you’re not done yet. Now, on to the next step—you need to make the product data actionable in your e-mail campaigns.

As we are sure you discovered when gathering your product information elements, the data points are likely to come from disparate sources—after all, you’ve pulled information from merchandising, IT, the supply chain group, marketing, etc. You need to consolidate all of this data, and make it as simple to incorporate into your campaign as you would with any other data based demographic. The value of having all of this data in one centralized location is:

- You have now built a platform that allows you to spend less time on tactical execution and shift your efforts to solving marketing problems.
- The integrity of your message has improved because product references are programmed and repurposed between departments, not individually crafted.

You have now developed an established process for creating, managing, and updating your product content database, and have leveraged technology, most likely from your ESP, to consolidate this data to one location. In order to harness all the work done during your segmentation analysis and put the right product in front of your customer at the right time, you now need a campaign management system that can handle this task. Working with the right partner that can act as the central repository for you product data, and provide the necessary e-mail marketing technology is essential. An e-mail campaign management system should be able to aptly handle the business rules you have created to match product content to segments, providing you your ticket to true one-to-one marketing.