

# PRODUCT INFORMATION MISMANAGEMENT

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Obstacles to fast product  
content publication that  
ecommerce teams face



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## INTRODUCTION

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The top goals of any online brand or ecommerce company include acquiring new customers and retaining existing ones. And the overall product experience is increasingly a key driver of customers' loyalty to a brand or site.

As opposed to traditional retail where the purchasing experience is tangible and physical, online shoppers are more reliant on the quality of information presented about the products.

Research shows that **77% of shoppers rely on product descriptions** <sup>1</sup> and consider them as an important element of the ecommerce experience. Also, **45% of US online adults will abandon their online purchase** <sup>2</sup> if they can't find a quick answer to their purchase-related questions.

Unbx'd commissioned a survey of 150 top stakeholders from ecommerce companies across North America. The aim of this survey was twofold:

- » Gauge the strategic importance of managing product content (encompassing text, images, videos and any other representations of products' details, features and capabilities) for online brands and ecommerce companies
- » Map the product content management process end-to-end and identify the inherent complexities and challenges

## KEY FINDINGS

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- » Product information management (PIM) involves multiple tools. Due to the distributed nature of product content inside an organization, dedicated PIM solutions coexist with non-specialized multi-purpose content management solutions.
- » Workflows for entering product information into PIM systems vary widely. However, certain common challenges impact content workflows across organizations.
- » Incoming raw data follows multiple file formats and channels, reflecting the diversity of the sources of data (e.g., automated systems versus manually generated files).
- » Significant time and resources are spent in data error correction and validation cycles.

## DETAILED FINDINGS

### The Product Content Team

A product content team is vital to ensure the success of online retail. Product content is made up of several components such as text, rich media, pricing, and other information that require dedicated resources and specialized expertise.

Factors such as number of products and volume of content play a role in defining the ideal size of a functional production team.

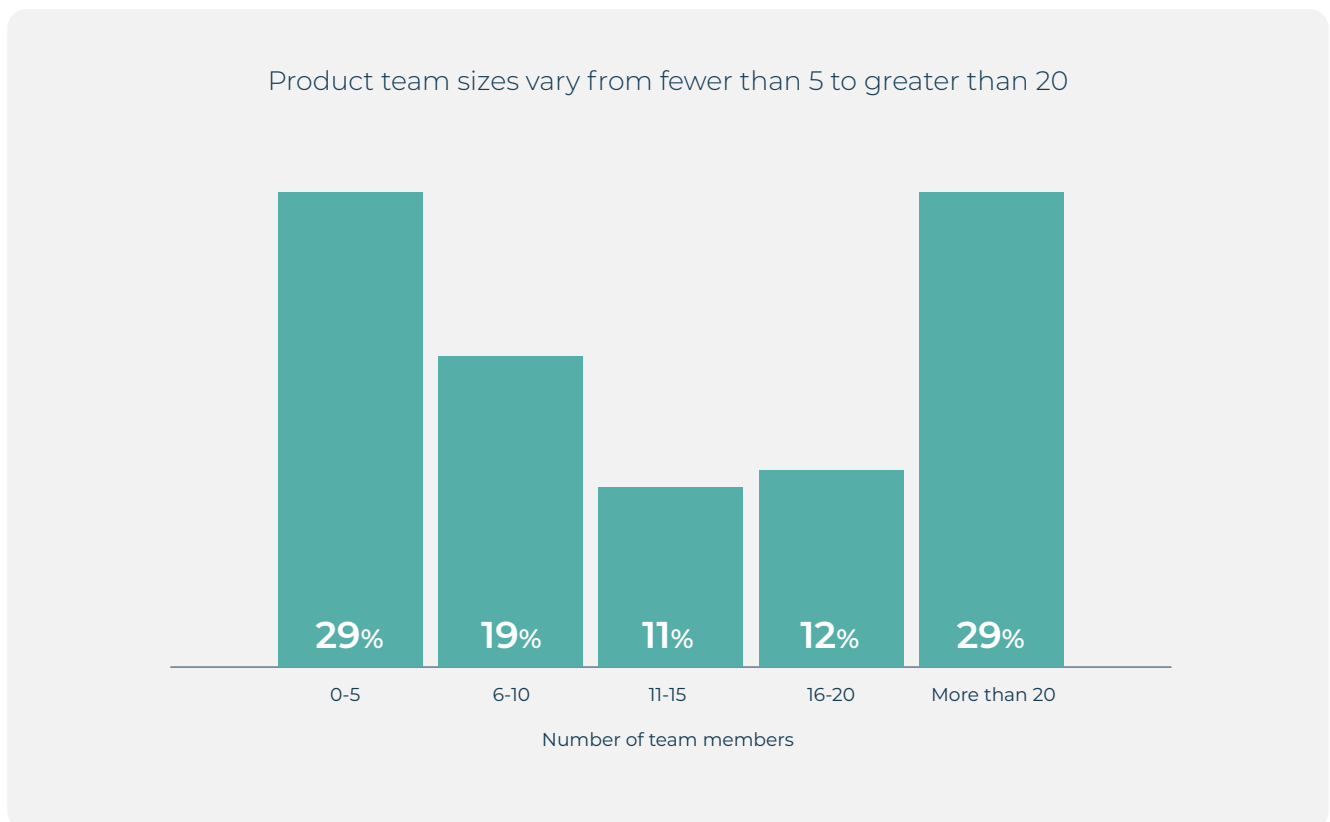


Fig 1. - How many people at your organization work on product content creation/updateation?

150 surveyees from the top ecommerce organizations in North America highlighted the sheer differences in the size of their product teams. Teams as small as 5 personnel to more than 20 are involved in the product content management function.

Small teams are more likely to possess an element of agility and transparency in their processes. But heavy workloads during crunch times could see smaller teams being overwhelmed. Larger teams have the advantage of scale, and varying workloads can be much easier to manage.

The almost universal prevalence of SEO specialists in product teams highlight the importance of search in ecommerce marketing. Considering absolute numbers, Content Editors and WebOps personnel were the second and third most prominent contributors to product content. However, the overlapping numbers are evidence to the fact that product teams are diverse and comprised of multiple specialists engaged in optimizing specific sections of content.

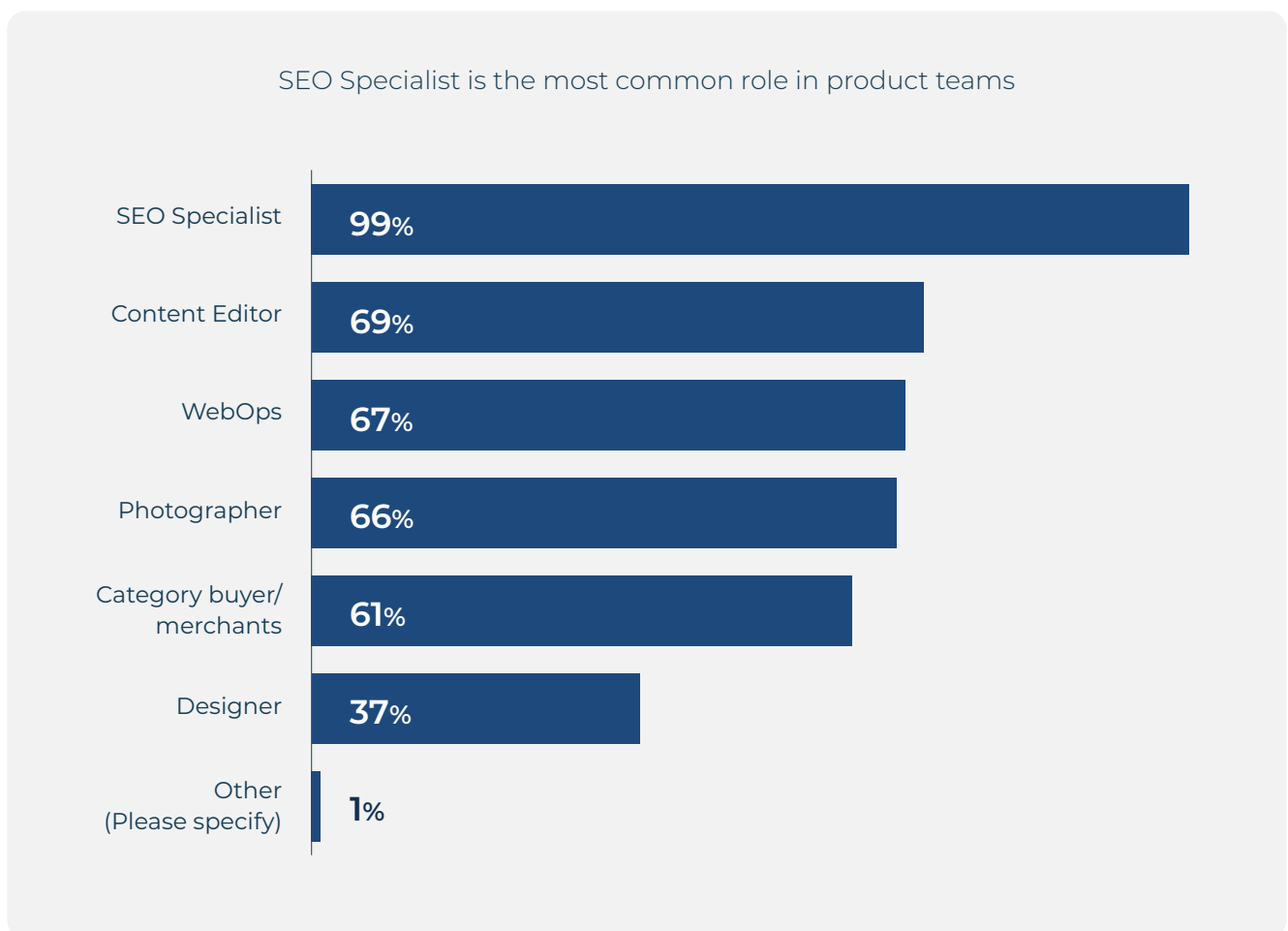


Fig 2. - What are the different roles in the product content creation/update group?

## Content Management Technologies

Fragmented content is a major challenge in the product content management process. Product content is broken down into its discrete components and distributed across multiple tools even within the same organization.

Almost 40% of surveyees' product data is distributed among systems

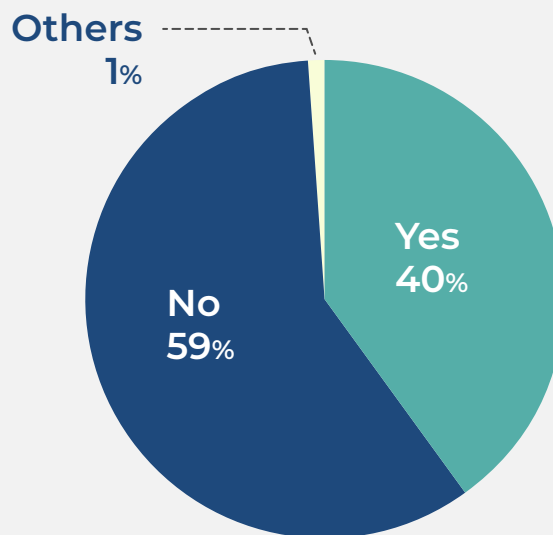


Fig 3. - Is your product information spread across multiple tools?

Hence multiple tools are used concurrently within a single organization to manage product content. Generic Content Management Systems (CMS) were the most commonly used systems, followed by ecommerce platforms. Dedicated product information management solutions are also in the mix, but to a slightly lesser degree as opposed to multipurpose systems. However, challenges are likely to arise when trying to aggregate the discrete content components into a cohesive product content. Inaccurate or out of date versions of product information have a high probability of being published and impact the overall product experience.

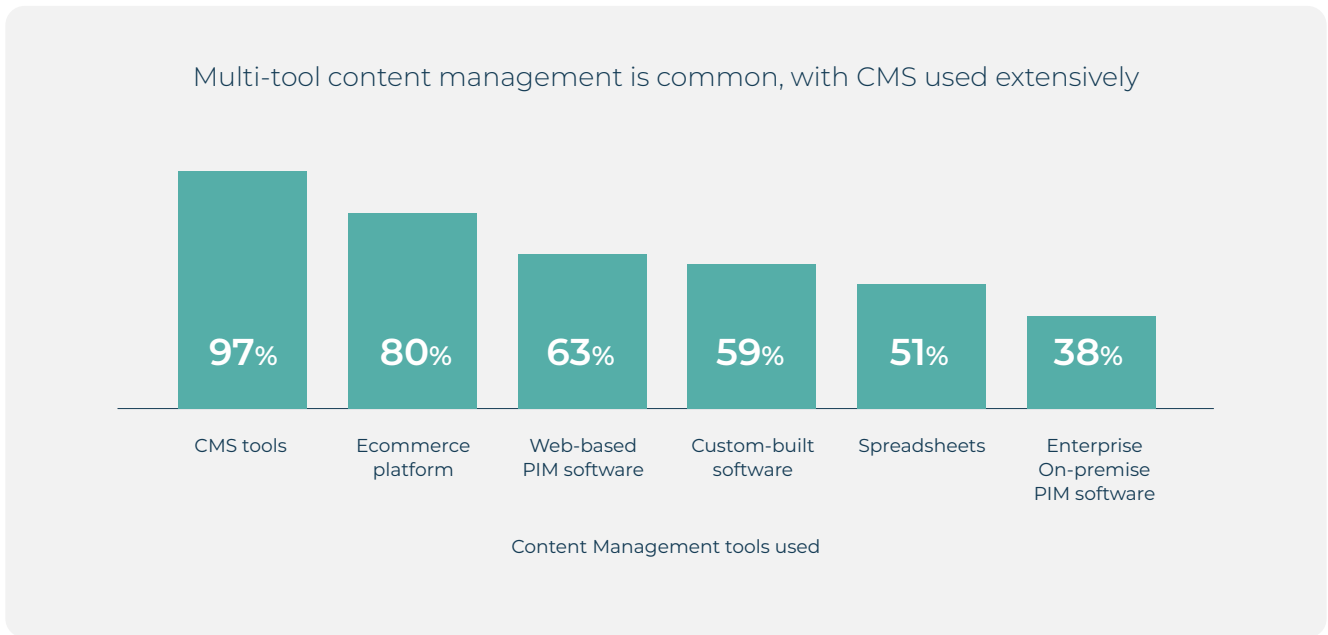


Fig 4. - What tools do you currently use for product content creation/update?

Coupled with the almost daily usage of the multiple tools (fig. 5) to manage the fragmented content, the challenges are exacerbated.

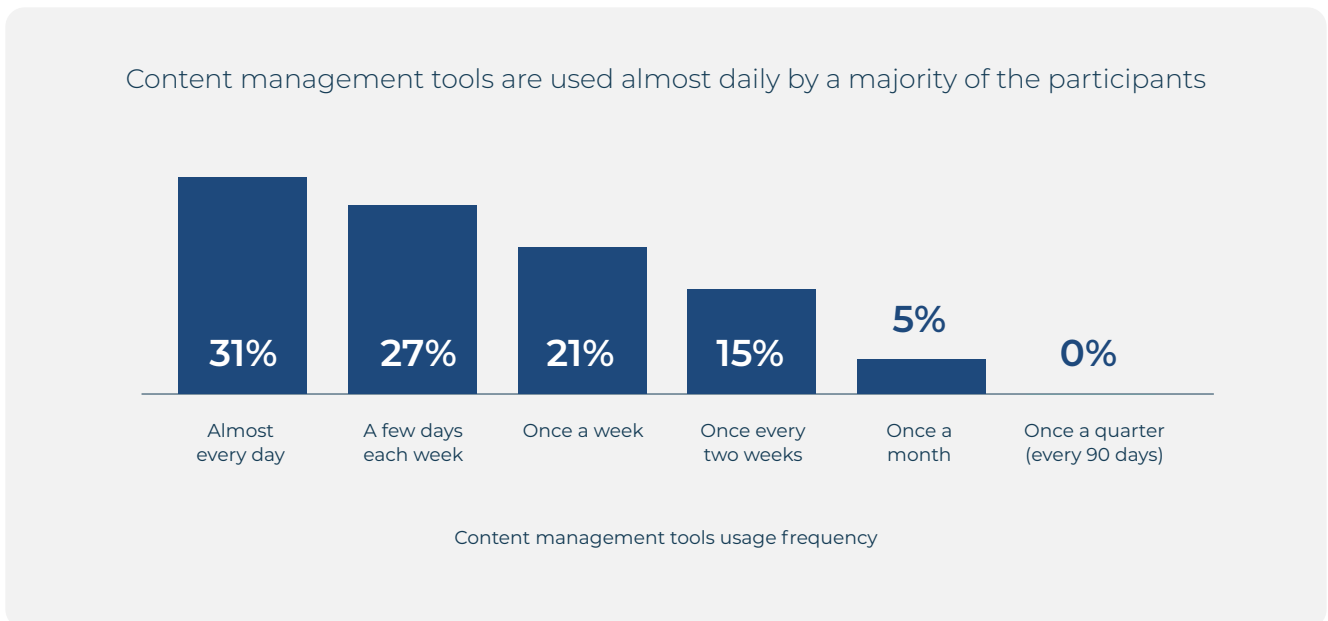


Fig 5. - How frequently are the above tools used for product information creation/update?

## Content Workflows

Our survey showed that typical product content workflows varied significantly from one organization to another.

Factors that were most frequently cited as reasons for added complexities to content workflows were:

- » Data formats and volumes
- » Quality and level of work required to sanitize and transform data
- » Security constraints (external suppliers versus internal personnel handling data)
- » Degree of technology maturity and permeance of automation

The most time consuming and contributing factors to the overall slowdown of workflows were identified as:

- » Missing data
- » Non-standardized formats for incoming data
- » Delays due to determining errors, corrections and revalidations
- » Consolidating data from various sources

## Data Import and Publishing

Spreadsheets and XML files are the predominant file formats in which product data is imported. The fact that multiple format data is used within a single organization can be inferred by the overlapping percentages.

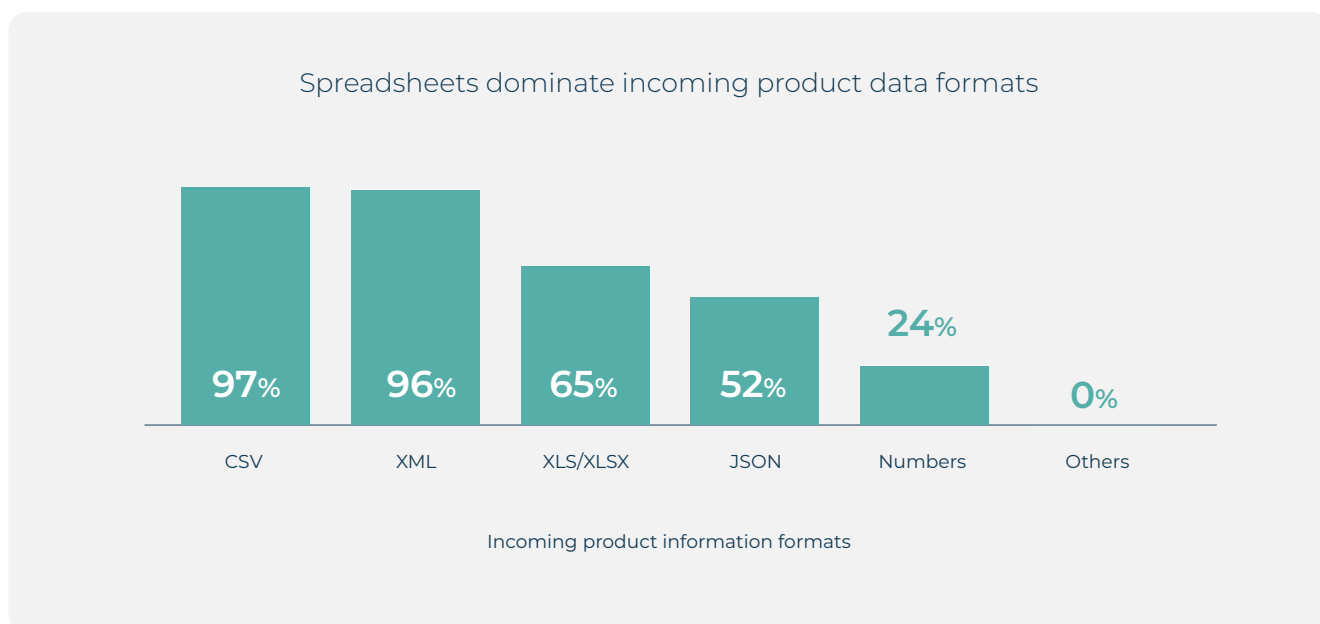


Fig 6. - In which formats do you receive product information?

The varied formats and sources of incoming product data highlight the critical role of standardization and processing of data into usable formats. Significant time and energy are spent to transform raw, unstructured product data into coherent product content. And the same is true during publishing, which requires data formats specific to the respective third party partners.

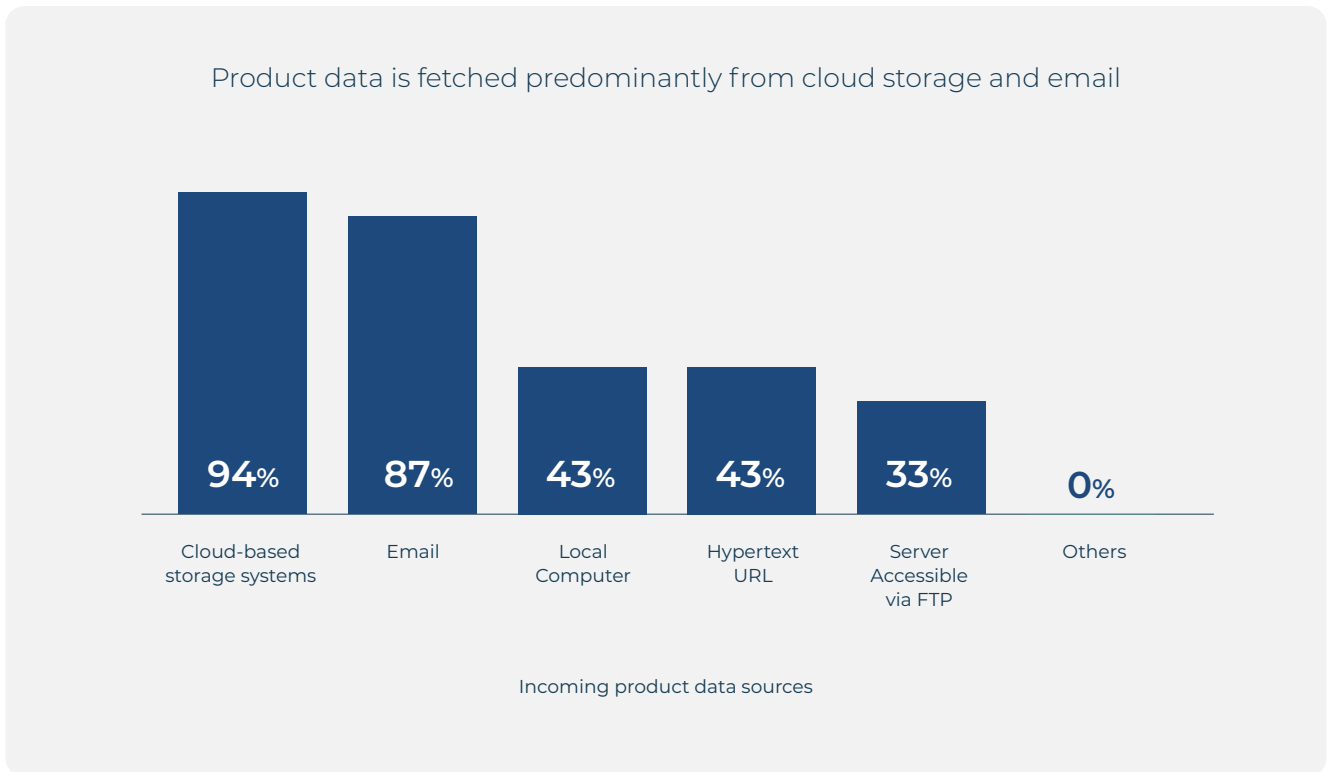


Fig 7. - How is your new/updated product information received?



Third party specific demands on data layouts, file formats (fig. 8) and channels (fig. 9) make data transformation at every instance highly time- and resource-consuming. Manual coordination and transformation of data into proprietary formats at every import and publishing instance can be a severe load on teams. Significant efficiencies can be uncovered by utilizing templated and automated approaches to import and publishing. Time savings, better resource utilization, and faster time to market are just some of the potential benefits of automations and templatzation.

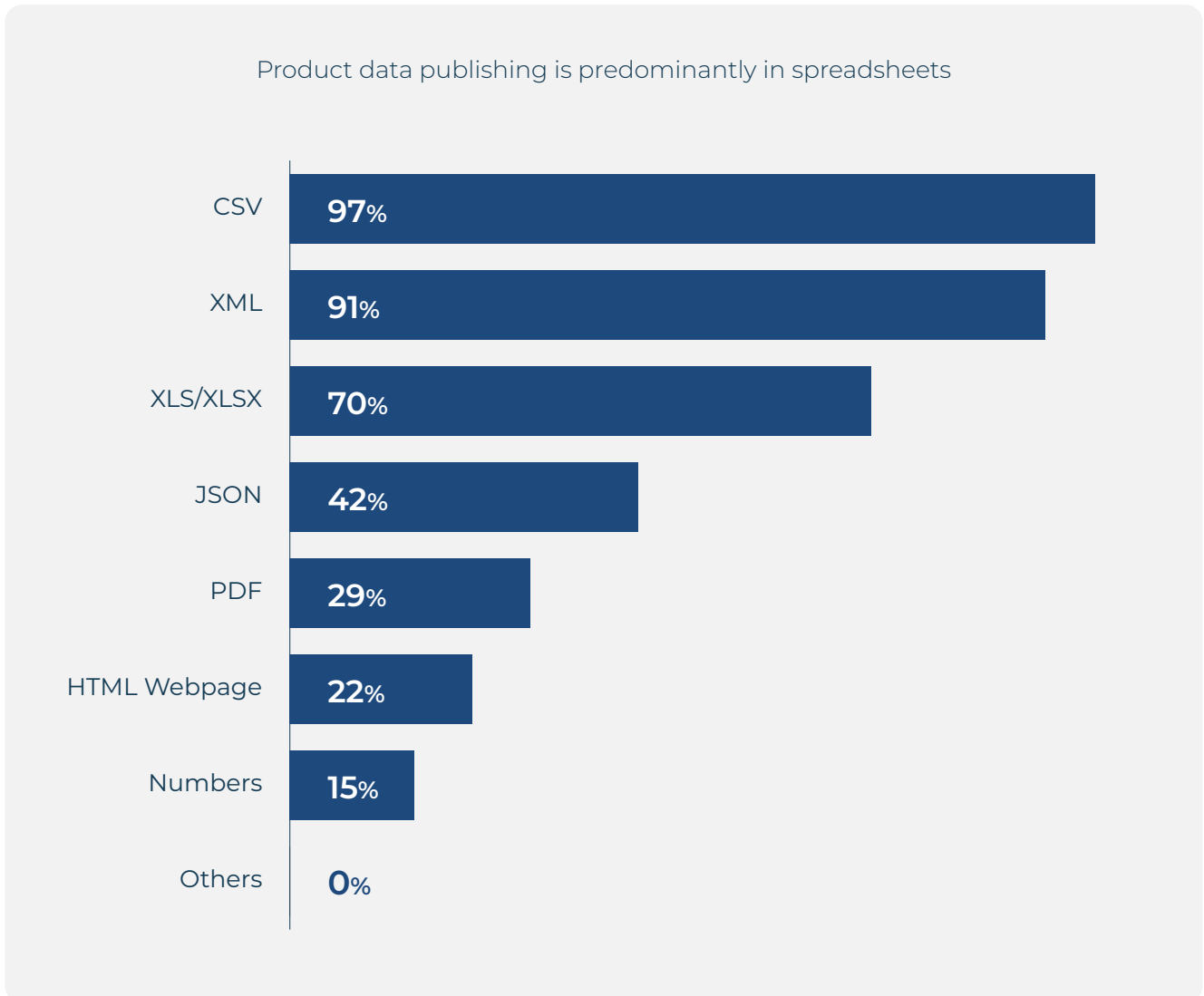


Fig 8. - In which formats does your product content have to be shared with third parties?

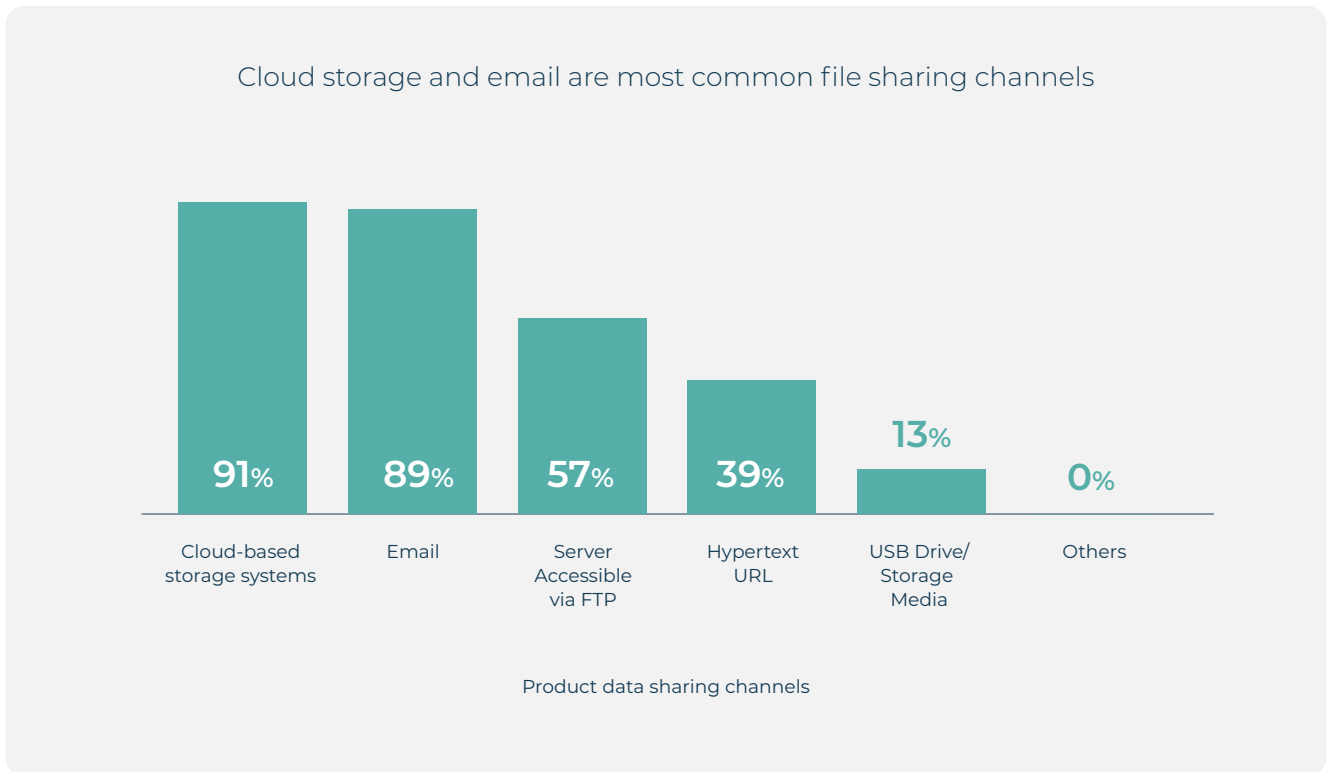


Fig 9. - How do you share your product content with third parties?

## Implications

Product content teams are often stymied from realizing significant efficiencies and productivity due to complexities in process and legacy technology. The lack of centralization, difficulties in task delegation, and complex publishing requirements can exacerbate the situation and compromise the overall data quality.

Automation and templization are effective in addressing content workflow challenges. Templization saves time with frequently performed tasks. A “create once, run infinite times” approach when combined with automation and scheduling can empower content operations to run with minimal or no human intervention. The risk of errors is significantly lowered, along with the time and effort to create, assign, and schedule critical parts of the content workflow. Data imports, workload management, and content publishing all provide prime opportunities for product teams to experiment and refine with automation and templization.

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PIM systems can also double as content databases in addition to content management tools. Promoting a PIM system as the single source of truth ensures the standards and practices that enhance overall data quality. Emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence can assist in areas such as data identification and fields mapping and help product teams achieve scalability when managing large volumes of product content.

## Considering a PIM

Teams seeking to integrate a PIM system into their content practices need to evaluate several factors to gauge if a PIM is a right fit for their needs.

- » **Number of products.** PIM systems offer benefits to the overall product information management process irrespective of the size of the product catalog. Companies selling a few thousand products can leverage PIM to easily manage large volumes of incoming product data while companies with a smaller product count can also benefit from rich media management, multi-lingual support, and other enhancement features offered by PIM.
- » **Import optimization.** As highlighted earlier, import files take multiple forms and file formats. Product teams must analyze the time they spend on transforming data from incoming sources into their internal formats. Overlaying those findings with the frequency in which they receive data, which in some cases can be as frequent as every day, will provide a compelling case for the adoption of a PIM. PIM features such as adapters and schedulers can greatly reduce the workload for teams during data imports.
- » **Accessibility and updating.** How product data is accessed and updated within a team is also a key influencer of PIM adoption. Multi-member product teams often require secure access and carefully planned data updation processes to ensure consistent and accurate data. The centralization of product information through PIM systems and standard PIM features such as access controls address these needs.
- » **Data publishing process.** Similar to import processes, the burden of transforming data into partner-specific formats during publishing usually falls on the product content teams. And as described earlier, platform or marketplaces requirements vary significantly. Many PIMs offer pre-built connectors of popular platforms (such as Amazon and Walmart) that can instantly transform data into required formats.

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## ABOUT UNBXD

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Unbxid is an AI-driven ecommerce Search Platform that understands shopper intent and connects them to products they are most likely to buy — across site search, navigation and recommendation purchase journeys. The platform combines AI-based automation, powerful merchandising controls, and extensive personalization capabilities to enhance on-site shopper experience and increase revenue for online retailers.

Unbxid enables 36 billion annual interactions and \$4.5 billion in online revenue for leading retailers like Express, HSN, Ashley HomeStore, and Rue21.

Learn more at [unbxid.com](https://unbxid.com) and follow us on Twitter [@unbxid](https://twitter.com/unbxid).

## ABOUT UNBXD PIM

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Unbxid PIM is a centralized, single source of truth of all ecommerce product data. Unbxid PIM helps brand and ecommerce product teams to aggregate, enrich, and publish product content. Unbxid PIM offers AI capabilities, digital asset management, and automation features that can showcase accurate product content in front of online shoppers faster.

Visit [unbxid.com/pim](https://unbxid.com/pim) to learn more.

### Notes

1. <https://www.marketingcharts.com/industries/retail-and-e-commerce-83523>
2. [https://go.forrester.com/blogs/12-06-20-consumers\\_drive\\_channel\\_preference\\_to\\_achieve\\_effortless\\_customer\\_service/](https://go.forrester.com/blogs/12-06-20-consumers_drive_channel_preference_to_achieve_effortless_customer_service/)