

UKBIM Alliance Product Data Working Group – Meeting 2 Interim Report

22 May 2018



The UK BIM Alliance Product Data Working group has had its second meeting. Here is an update of its discussions so far. You can read the first interim report here:

<http://bit.ly/PDWGinterim1>

Members of the group have spoken with several dozen individuals representing organisations and disciplines from across industry. We are also engaging with around 75 people through the dedicated #product_data channel on the UK BIM Alliance Slack conversation platform.

We continue to welcome discussion, suggestions and other comments on this work. You can contact us via the communications methods set out at the bottom of this document. The group will be meeting again on 12th June.

1. Structured Data

We have received strong support for our assertion that the industry needs a plain English definition of structured data, and are working towards a draft of this and an explanation of key terms. We are also looking at defining key terms and referencing existing glossaries as further support for readers.

2. Standards

After our April meeting we opened a conversation with the BSI (British Standards Institution – the UK National Standards Body) to explore the current landscape of national, European and international standards concerning BIM, digital construction and product data, and the timetable for development of new and revised standards. This has been extremely useful and reinforced the conclusion at our April meeting that the work of the relevant bodies and technical committees needs to be better known and communicated across industry, so that companies can align with the relevant standards and plan to align their product data work with them.

3. National Body

We believe there should be a body to help co-ordinate and communicate the product data challenge, and we have been consulting on what form it should take. There are groups like this in at least two European countries we could learn from. The body would act as a facilitator of best practice for product data across industry, acting as a channel of communication between the standards community and the users of product data and supporting initiatives such as open data standards and the LEXiCON project. We're holding conversations with the BSi and other parties to further this discussion. Please let us know if you have views on this or any of this report.

4. Data Hosting

In our first interim report, we expressed the feeling that the market for hosting product data may not at present serve the objective of product data in the most effective way. We've had conversations with hosting companies and will have more. We agree that there is a market for services associated with data hosting, comparison and management. However, we are aware that manufacturers need to be the single source of truth and that data can be hosted anywhere; indeed, it should not be siloed in hosting company's servers for commercial gain. This doesn't mean there isn't a commercial service to be provided, it is simply that it mustn't restrict the necessary movement of data or create duplication or errors. Ultimately the market will decide what is required. Whilst the landscape is changing the PDWG feels the need to provide clarity to manufacturers, specifiers, contractors and clients on this issue.

We continue to welcome submissions from individuals and organisations with a strategic perspective to help us in this.

5. Data Journey

Last week saw the publication of the Hackitt Report, 'Building a Safer Future', in which Dame Judith Hackitt describes in Chapter 8 a 'golden thread of key information' about a building to ensure safety management. The review identifies four key information products which contribute to this golden thread; one of these is a digital record of the building – as planned and then as built.

Our concept of the 'Data Journey' aligns with this idea of a 'golden thread' and we believe only the proper creation and management of structured information will make it possible for an accurate 'digital record' of an asset to exist.

To date the focus of managing product data through BIM has involved attaching data to 3D 'objects' – models of products which can be downloaded and inserted into a building information model. Whilst this idea was sensible in the past, we believe it is causing problems and is not always necessary. Indeed, it inflates the importance of the 3D data (which might not be an identifiable product in any case) and diminishes the importance of all the other data about the products. 3D objects can also create difficulties with huge amounts of irrelevant data, which can become separated from the original source and no longer accurate as products change.

Some practitioners have recognised these issues and instead focused on 'Product Data Templates' as a solution. We recognise that there is little understanding of the difference between a Product Data Template (a set of agreed important parameters for a type of product) and a Product Data Sheet (the information about a particular product). This misunderstanding is evidence of the huge need for basic education in our industry.

The working group will continue to look at the data journey in the light of the Hackitt Recommendations, and we welcome input from professionals who can show us their challenges and what they need.

6. Terminology

Our interviewees are agreed on the importance of one or many interlinked data dictionaries which are built using a shared methodology. We are aware that data dictionaries are the 'poor relation' where funds for this important work are limited. We are continuing to write up the detail of this area and speaking to the standards organisations to clarify matters.

7. Security

In our last report, we asked: "Data needs to be secure, but is there a particular need for product data?"

We continue to ask this question. Asset security is an issue for clients, and products are a part of that. We have become aware of manufacturers concerns for IP and want to reassure manufacturers that they won't need to share any more information than they already provide in brochures and data sheets.

We welcome further input on product data security issues from people across industry to tell us whether product data security is an issue for them, and provide us with examples so that we can investigate this area further.

8. Education

Finally, in our quest to help communicate the value of product data and the need for standard ways of working, we continue to discuss how we can educate our industry.

Professionals need to know

1. What is required,
2. Why it is required,
3. How to structure data,
4. Where to go for information and
5. How to use information.

We believe there are too many competing sources for information with varying degrees of authority, and hope we can provide guidance in this area. But ultimately, we need to encourage sharing of best practice with less spin.

Talk to Us

There are three ways of getting in touch with the working group:

1. Keep informed of requests for information by subscribing to the Alliance newsletter here: <http://bit.ly/UKBIMAnews>
2. Join the Alliance Slack Workspace to have conversations with the workgroup members and fellow interested parties: <http://bit.ly/joinUKBIMAslack> There is a dedicated #product_data channel for these conversations.
3. Email the group directly at pdwg@ukbimalliance.org

If you wish us to contact you directly you can fill out this form which also allows you to confirm if you want to be listed as a contributor: <http://eepurl.com/dryptb>

You can read the first interim report here: <http://bit.ly/PDWGinterim1>

Su Butcher

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