

Part 2: Data Management Guidance for Manufacturers

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Introduction

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Why This Guidance

Digitizing your sustainable product data isn’t just another task to check off the list. The industry is shifting and it’s heading toward a more transparent, digitized and connected data ecosystem. Now is your chance to consider your strategy and implementation plan to elevate your sustainability data to enrich the material evaluation process, unlock informed product specification decisions and prove ROI when specifying your products.

The Data Ecosystem Report defines manufacturers as “givers” who are at the heart of the Ecosystem. “Givers” share digitized product data to “receivers”, such as workflow tools, by leveraging the Data Schema v1.0 Beta. This high quality data enables streamlined data endpoints to not only allow for consistent data, but also unlocks a foundation for measuring material impact and ROI at scale.

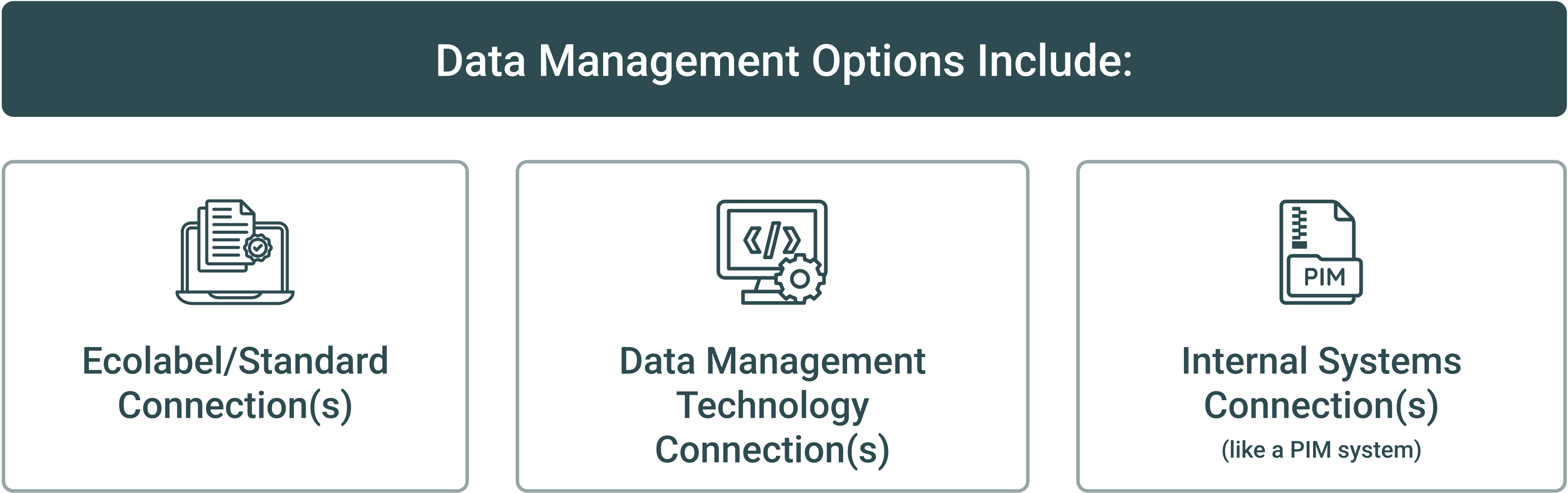
Where Part 1 of this guidance helped you align your current communications strategy with the CMF, this guide, Part 2, helps you to step confidently into the future of a connected data ecosystem. Through practical insights and clear guidance on available pathways, you’ll be able to understand how aligning with the CMF, digitizing and connecting your data will make your products more visible, accessible and impactful throughout the industry.



Introduction

There are currently three “options” in which manufacturers can choose to manage their sustainability data. In some cases, manufacturers may choose more than one option. All of these options should be considered by each organization as it relates to their bandwidth, current sustainability investments as well as budgets.

The goal is to decide on a “source of truth”, a singular place you are managing your product, brand and sustainability data from. All of these options can help to streamline the work ensuring your digital brand presence in workflow tools is clean, accurate and continuously updated as your data updates.



Selecting the right solution—or combination of solutions—for your organization’s goals is complex, and no single platform may check every box. Evaluate each option for how it supports your workflows, reduces redundancy, and streamlines data connection and digitization for CMF alignment.

This system and its supporting platforms are still evolving. As the ecosystem grows, each organization should reassess which tools best meet its needs.

Things to Consider When Getting Started

To ease the process, we have gathered some key items that you should consider prior to reviewing and selecting an option. Review each question below and jot down your answers to reference back to later.

What is your budget? There is typically a cost for a service/program that is used. It's worth considering cost both in terms of dollars as well as time for your team.

How big is your team: Is it just you or do you have staff and/or an IT team to help? Each option will require time spent on the initial set-up as well as managing the data at some capacity. If you have a lot of products, limited IT/sustainability data knowledge and/or limited bandwidth, it could be advantageous to source the work externally through a data management service and/or utilizing ecolabels/certifications.

Do you want to manage your data directly or would you prefer another party be responsible to oversee/share the data for you? Each option provides a different level of control over your data management. Note, with greater control comes greater responsibility and time needed to ensure your data is shared appropriately and accurately.

Where can your sustainability data be found? It's important to know where customers are able to find your information and how it's showing up.

For instance, your products may be showing up as a collection or are grouped together as a component which could cause search problems.

How many ecolabel/standards (certifications) do you have? Determine if you want each ecolabel/standard org to share the information for you or if you want to gather all the necessary documentation so that you can share it to sources such as workflow tools. APIs for many ecolabel/standards are already established, but you have the ability to pick and ensure the method your managing your data with is the "source of truth". Coordination across various parties will be required to ensure that "source of truth" is the data recognized.

Ensure you have a plan for managing and overseeing product naming consistency. Using the same company and product names—including spelling, punctuation, and capitalization—across all systems makes your products easier to match within downstream workflow tools.

Limiting the use of additional symbols (trademark logo or Copyright logo) and words (LLC or Inc.) will help to ensure your brand is consistently listed. E.g. a company could be written as "The Materials Company", "The Materials Co.", "The materials co, LLC".

Certificate Bundling: Some ecolabel/standards allow for "bundling" to save time and money on the certification process.

Although this is true, bundling can also create unintentional complications specifically with the naming conventions and searchability of the products. It is important to consider these implications at the time of ecolabel/standard investment and/or renewal.

Navigating the Options

- Option 1: Ecolabel / Standard Body Connection(s)
- Option 2: Data Management Technology Connection(s)
- Option 3: Internal Systems Connection(s)



*Should be included in cost of ecolabel/standard

Option 1: Ecolabel / Standard Body Connection(s)

This option would enable you to leverage API connections already established by common ecolabel/standards—such as HPDs, Declare, and EPDs (among many others)—to consolidate, sometimes verify, and connect sustainability certificates, and sometimes data that can be shared to the broader industry.

What to Consider: Before moving forward with this option, it is essential to carefully review and consider where each ecolabel/standard is on their digitization journey. For more information on where major ecolabel/standard bodies are in supporting digitization and connectivity of your sustainability claims, please visit the Ecolabel/Standards Digitization Journey Survey results [here](#).

Specific items to consider:

- This option provides the simplest path for certified sustainability information to reach the external platforms where your customers find your products. By participating in the ecolabel/standards program, your certification data can be connected directly into customer workflows.
- This option commonly requires meticulous oversight of product or collection naming conventions on certifications (brand and SKU level) to ensure accurate positioning and search functionality in workflow.
- There may or may not be a standardized update timeline for API connections to update new ecolabel/standards information into workflow tools. Update cadences can vary from monthly, to bi-monthly, to even every six months, etc.
- Depending on the connections established by workflow tools to outside sources, various versions of the same certification may be visible.
- Depending on the organization, correcting and/or applying updates may be difficult for manufacturers to navigate.

Ecolabel / Standard Body Connection(s): Questions to Ask and Answer

When considering this option, review the ecolabel/certification body's capabilities and ask yourself, and them, the following questions.

Are they engaged with the work at mM?

Is this ecolabel/standard represented in the mM CMF Prioritization v1.0?

Have they adopted the mM CMF Prioritization v1.0 Data Schema v1.0 Beta?

Does this organization have a digital output available through an API or other?

What information is provided on the certification PDF?

What data (if any) is available within their database structure that can be shared externally?

Do they bundle certifications that make finding specific products in workflow tools difficult?

What is their process on correcting errors?

How often do they update certificate data to outside parties via APIs and/or other digital connections?

Navigating the Options

- Option 1: Ecolabel / Standard Body Connection(s)
- Option 2: Data Management Technology Connection(s)
- Option 3: Internal Systems Connection(s)

Resource Considerations

Investment

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Commitment



Option 2: Data Management Technology Connection

The use of data management services can help consolidate and manage product data. See mM's Tech Partners who provide Data Management solutions for manufacturers [here](#).

What to Consider: Before moving forward with this option, it is essential to carefully review terms, costs and bandwidth needed for set up, maintenance and overall outcomes when working with a Data Management solution. Specific items to consider include:

- The use of their service standardizes how your product claims and data are shared across platforms.
- This option provides you with more control over your product data than ecolabel/standard option, however, requires a bit more time to oversee & execute, but less time than internally managing your data (Option 3).
- You typically can upload a large quantity of products at once through various mass upload options, instead of one by one which saves time and money.
- There is typically a use/subscription fee to use the data management service, ensure that you fully understand what the fee covers and what is considered an add-on.
- The data that is provided to a data management provider can quickly become out of date which requires additional time and oversight from your team.
- The turnaround time for updates can take longer than desired and are sometimes inconsistent requiring additional time and oversight from your team.
- Each data management service manages its own data flows, keeping your data within their tool, while some allow connections to all workflow tools.

Data Management Technology Connection: Questions to Ask and Answer

When considering this option, review the data management services and ask yourself, and them, the following questions.

Are they a tech partner of mM?

Have they adopted the mM CMF Prioritization v1.0 Data Schema v1.0 Beta?

What is the cost of their service and add-ons?

What data do they request that you send to them?

What data do they have publicly available?

What do you, the manufacturer, have control over and what is out of your control?

What is the ownership structure of the data you're sharing with them?

What is their process to update certifications and general information?

Are updates done manually (spreadsheets) or digitally (API)?

How often does data from outside sources get updated? Immediately, bi-weekly, monthly?

Can you update your data in their service or does it need to be sent to them for them to update?

What is their process on correcting errors and duplicates?

Does the data management solution enable API connections to many workflow tools?

Navigating the Options

- Option 1: Ecolabel / Standard Body Connection(s)
- Option 2: Data Management Technology Connection(s)
- Option 3: Internal Systems Connection(s)

Resource Considerations

Investment

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Commitment



Option 3: Internal Systems Connection(s)

Managing product data and sustainability claims internally - often through tools such as Product Information Management (PIM) systems, PMDS, ERP, Salsify, etc, and/or spreadsheets.

What to Consider: Before moving forward with this option, it is essential to carefully review and consider the team you have internally, your internal IT expertise, time and bandwidth availability to support and oversee internal data management and ensure it is connected to outside tools successfully. Maintenance of these connections will also have to be considered. More specific items to consider include:

- In this option, you have the most control over how data is shared, however, it is also the most time-consuming compared to the other two options.
- Your data will be available for others within your organization to easily access.
- You're able to ensure accurate information is being shared internally and externally.
- It can be a long, complex and expensive process with multiple team members working on the effort to originally set up an internal system.
- You will need to evaluate, make the initial connection and understand processes to share this data with all sources, and where you want your data to be displayed.
- You (or someone on your team) will have to be the connection point between all of the sources that you want your products to be displayed and ensure data is provided accurately to them.
- Each source/platform that data is shared with has different processes to receive this data which can become overwhelming and difficult to manage.
- Suggested Pilot: learn how much time and money it takes to pull together product information for a select number of products to identify a baseline and the process.

Data Management Technology Connection: Questions to Ask and Answer

When considering this option, review the different internal systems and ask yourself, and them, the following questions.

What is my team's bandwidth, knowledge and tech abilities?

How well versed are you and your team with the Common Materials Framework and mM CMF Prioritization v1.0 Data Schema v1.0 Beta?

Where do we want customers to be able to find our product information? E.g., what workflow tools? How many?

How collaborative are all the departments within the company so that gathering information and documentation can be easily accomplished?

Do you have the capabilities to manage all connections with outside sources (e.g. workflow tools)?

What formats do these outside sources require the data in?

Do you want a manual (spreadsheet) or automatic (API) connection to outside sources?

Collect ROI Data from Workflow Tools

Coming soon!

ROI Data Connections

We understand that industry demand and return on investment (ROI) drives priorities and business decisions. That's why moving from a manual to a digital process is so critical to ensure consistency in sharing sustainability data which ultimately means time and money saved. As data is digitized and connected to workflow tools, ROI Data Connections will become available back to the Manufacturer (finally, 'closing the loop').

What This Means: Through a digital connection, and depending on what option you move forward with, you will be able to:

Reduce the amount of time it takes to manually input information which leaves more time to innovate and sell.

Receive live up-to-date information about your products to understand how they stack up against each other.

Clear line of sight on how your products align with the CMF.

Know that your products sustainability information will be consistent across channels that you have identified as important to your company through the Data Schema v1.0 Beta.

Have a clear picture of what certifications are important to your target audience.

Collect sales won and lost insights to help shape your strategy moving forward.

Each workflow tool has its own analytics and features so be sure to request information on what data you would be receiving. The workflow tools (aka tech partners) who align with the mM CMF will have signed our Tech Agreement which ensures the correct usage of the CMF, although they may also have their own data analytics processes.

As we look to the future, we envision sustainability data at the fingertips of every material decision-maker, powered by mindful MATERIALS' Common Materials Framework. And this is just the beginning.

In a world not so far away, manufacturers of every size and specialty won't be asking "How do we get started?" but instead "What sustainable material can we innovate next?" We're proud to help lead the material shift already underway, and to continue supporting manufacturers on their journey toward fully digitized, connected data.

Shared Resources. Common Language. Connected Data. Together.