Product Configurators – Information System Support for Configurable Products[1]

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Abstract. Product configurators have become an important information technology for the sales, order and delivery processes of many companies. In this article we discuss the types of configurable products and configuration related processes that can gain the most from such technology. Configurable products transfer much of the design work from the sales-delivery process to the R&D process. This requires systemizing the product and the related product knowledge. We present a general model of the R&D and sales-delivery processes for configurable products. The major benefits and problems of configurable products are then discussed.

This product and process-oriented view serves as a basis for our treatment of product configurators. Configurators with up-to-date product information allow non-product-experts to make error-free sales specifications and production orders. Configurators also reduce lead-times in the sales-delivery process. The major problem with product configurators are the long-term management and maintenance of the product knowledge as product models and product instances evolve.

The underlying thesis in this article is that product configurators on their own are not enough to make the sales and order fulfilment processes more efficient. The success of a configuration system in any company is based on adequate systemisation of the product, in some cases even re-designing the product for configurability, and the systemisation and reengineering of the configuration related processes.

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