



Report

Product Compliance & Sustainability Trend Study 2026

Benchmarks & Investment Priorities for Manufacturers
With Programs That Scale





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Executive Summary

Three quarters of report participants are responsible for product compliance and sustainability and work closely with it every day. Nearly 60% of them name incomplete data and data integrity as a major challenge.

Regulatory and customer requirements are rising faster than manual data management can keep pace, and the current data quality companies have access to isn't supporting their risk mitigation and competitive advantage processes. Survey respondents rank AI and automation as the largest opportunity ahead of them, yet few have integrated it into their systems.

Only one-third of respondents say the process they are currently using actually works.

Companies want product compliance that scales, built on product intelligence and technology that support proactive decisions that protect their product lines, customer revenue, and business growth. The gap between that ambition and where companies are today with their product compliance and sustainability programs is wide. For example, alongside incomplete data, respondents also cite regulatory complexity as a major risk. The pattern continues with companies that report the worst data quality also being the least likely to invest in software, as reactive data collection and reporting consumes the resources they would need to implement it.

Breaking the reactive cycle requires connected, dependable part, product, and supplier data. A strong data foundation informs product design and procurement decisions, and it feeds the AI tools teams increasingly rely on. Paired with deep manufacturing regulatory expertise to guide companies through changing requirements, this is the case for product intelligence as the primary lever for reducing business risk. The findings in this report show how wide the data gap has grown for many manufacturers, and what is needed to correct it.

Editor's Note

This study was fielded and analyzed by IPOINT in partnership with Pforzheim University between April and June 2026. Since the research was completed, Assent has acquired IPOINT, bringing its product material compliance and sustainability capabilities into the Assent Network. The survey data, interview findings, and analysis appear as they were collected, and nothing has been restated or reweighted.

Read about the acquisition

[Learn More](#)

Connected Data

Part

Product

Supplier

Key report findings include:



75%

of respondents work closely or very closely with product compliance and sustainability requirements



70%

of respondents use spreadsheets as their primary working tool, ahead of ERPs and specialized LCA tools



57%

name incomplete data as a challenge



40%

see AI and automation as the most significant market opportunity



72%

of companies with integrated systems see AI as an opportunity



55%

cite data quality and timeliness as the reason why carbon data from their supply chain doesn't meet their standards

Methodology summary:

This study surveyed 131 specialists and managers across the automotive, electronics, and manufacturing sectors in partnership with Pforzheim University. The surveys were complemented by seven in-depth interviews with experts from a range of industries.





What This Research Brings to the Manufacturing Industry

Expectations from customers and regulators are rising, influenced by economic pressures, changing regulatory dynamics, and global disruptions like trade restrictions, which are outside their control. This report provides benchmarking data and insights to support companies in making strategic decisions on where to prioritize their time, money, and resources to best support the reduction of risk in their business.

Note

A detailed breakdown of study participant information can be found in the [appendix](#).

Data Collection Methodology

The study pairs two complementary data collection methodologies designed to deliver robust insights that accurately reflect the reality of participants. A standardized online survey was delivered to 131 industry specialists, asking 25 questions that offer breadth to the research. A series of seven qualitative expert interviews were conducted to deliver depth to the overall data set.

Data Collection Methodologies

131 Industry Specialists

25 Questions

7 Qualitative Expert Interviews

Why Partner With Pforzheim University?

Our collaboration with the university guarantees the unbiased scientific integrity of the data and insights collected. They assisted in shaping a transparent study design, analyzed data clusters and personas, and supported significance testing and reproducibility.





Establishing the Status Quo

While respondents are heavily involved in the product compliance and sustainability process day-to-day, a large portion of participants don't consider the processes they have in place to be efficient. These findings are indicative of a theme noted throughout the entire study:

There is a significant disparity between goals and implementation in the product compliance and sustainability processes companies leverage today.

Tools Are Failing to Meet Expectations

Key Figures



70%

of respondents use Excel and lists to manage product compliance



31%

report using specialized product compliance tools



52%

of respondents classify their supply chains as highly complex



1/3

of respondents would classify their processes as efficient



57%

of companies perceive their approach to sustainability and product compliance requirements as operational, not strategic



15%

of companies claim to use product compliance and sustainability to their strategic advantage

Current Tools Won't Support Companies at Scale

The prevalent use of manual systems to manage product compliance, combined with the reported lack of process efficiency, indicates that many companies are at an impasse. They're aware the processes they use are resource-heavy, with nearly **70% of respondents spending up to two hours daily on manual work**, and that their supply chains are inherently complex. But the effort and time spent on manual product compliance management takes away from their ability to implement more effective technology-based solutions.

Anecdotal evidence from the interviews further supports this conclusion:



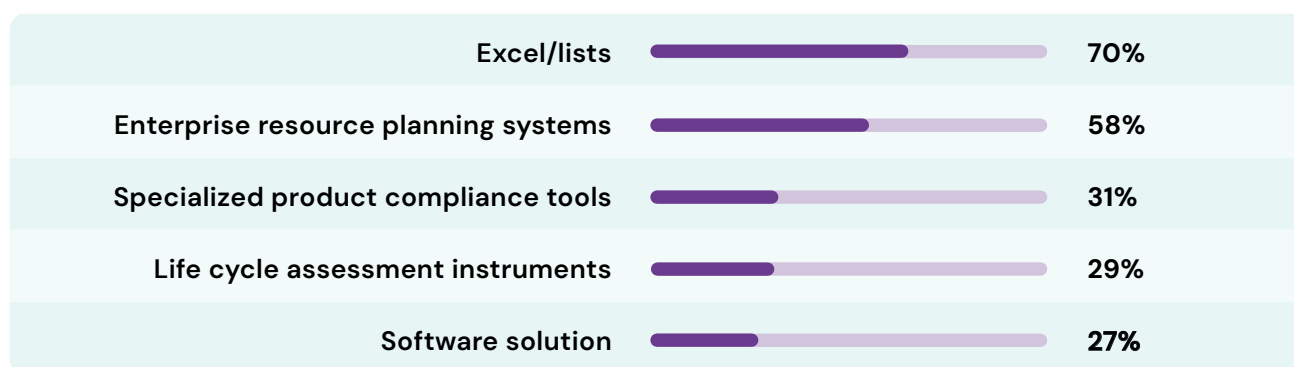
"If we digitize, [we should be sure it will] not require more effort than previously."

Companies Aren't Leveraging the Risk Reduction Advantage Their Programs Could Provide

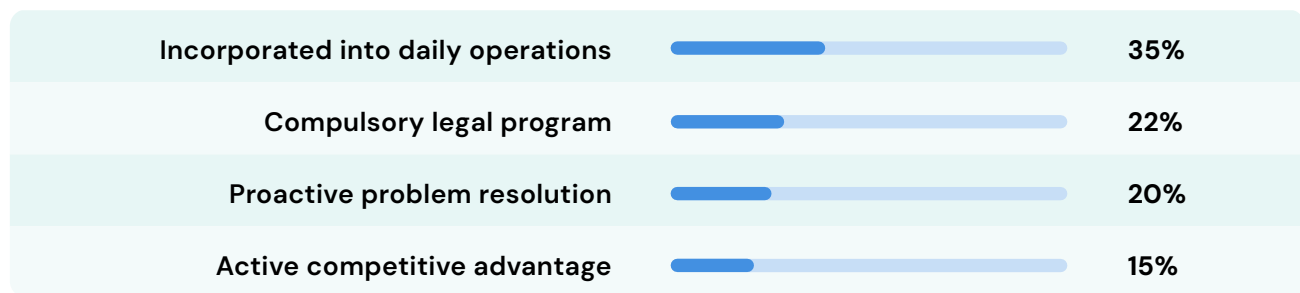
Product compliance and sustainability programs built on product intelligence help companies strategically reduce their risk through less supply chain disruption, stronger relationships with their customers, and insights that support proactive decision-making throughout their organization. Report findings indicate that this potential advantage is largely underutilized, with **only 15% of respondents claiming to use their program for an active competitive advantage**. The majority of companies are stuck in a reactive loop, using their programs to respond to legal concerns and daily program management, with much of that time dedicated to manual work.

Of the industries participating in the study, automotive demonstrates the most distinct strategic profile influenced by customers and market dynamics.

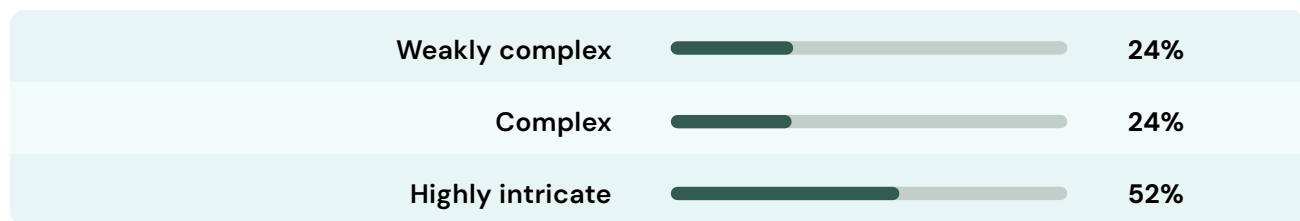
Utilization of Tools



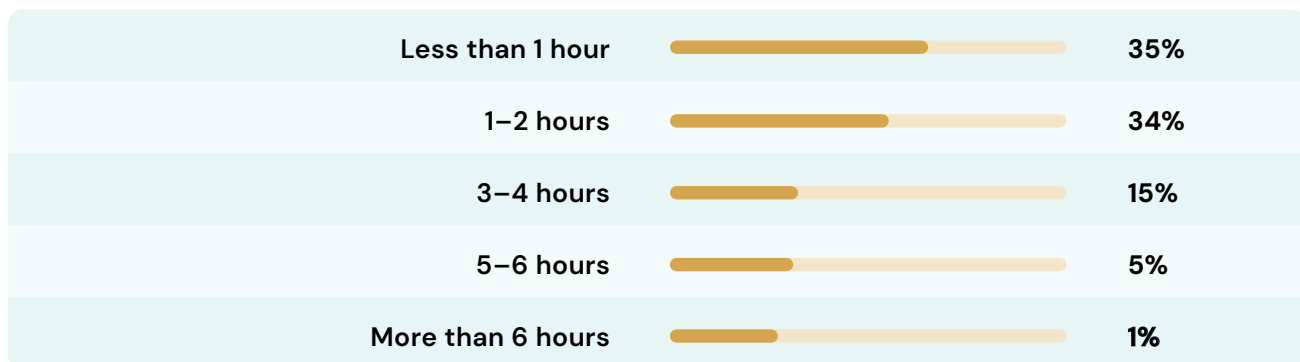
Strategies Utilizing External Pressure



Supply Chain Intricacy



Daily Time Investment on Repetitive Tasks



See how Assent's network intelligence gives you a strategic advantage, helping you reduce risk and make products the world can trust.

Speak to an Expert





Industry Trends

Industry trends indicate that material and chemical management are a top focus area for participants, alongside a rising emphasis on sustainability and data reporting. With the need for quality supply chain data growing rapidly to match increasingly complex customer and regulatory requirements, companies know they must invest in technology to help their programs scale.

Key Figures



34%

of respondents rank material product compliance as their primary focus



43%

cite technology and software as a top investment priority

Evidence Is Critical to Supporting Material Product Compliance Efforts

Survey respondents place a high degree of importance on material product compliance, sustainability, and the need to incorporate these insights into their organizational processes and culture. This indicates a growing priority for organizational alignment on the way supply chain data is managed and leveraged to demonstrate product compliance. With sustainability requirements increasing for emerging topics like Digital Product Passports (DPP), companies will need to be prepared to show evidence of their product compliance efforts on demand in 2026 and beyond.

Companies Prioritize Investments in Technology & Data

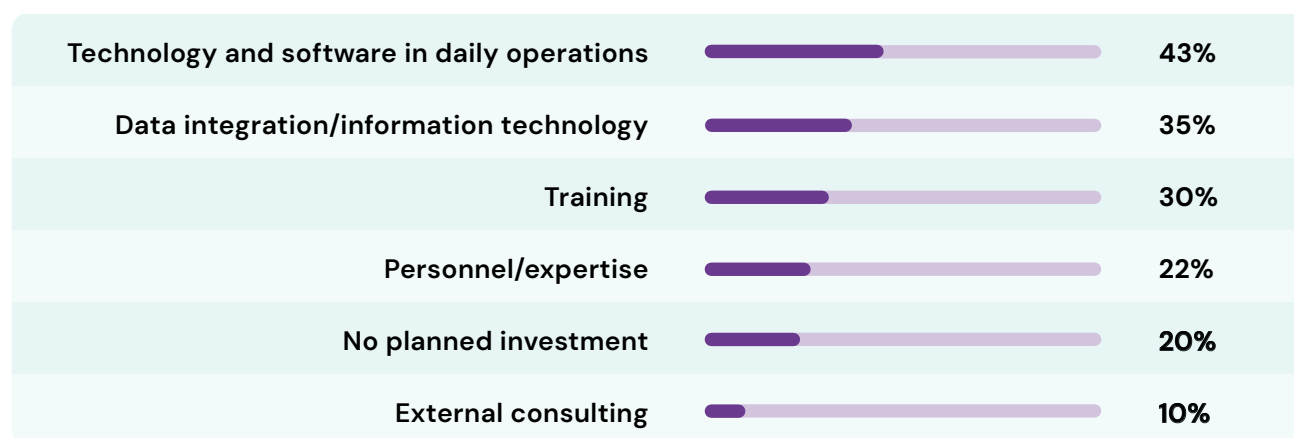
Investment priority is concentrated in technology and software, a sentiment backed by **43% of respondents**, with data integration following closely behind. These results indicate companies are seeking to address their product compliance and sustainability requirements by using software to gain efficiencies and, in the case of **22% of respondents**, by also placing additional investment priority on expertise.

Companies are aware that investment in software and expert guidance will be needed to keep pace with requirements from regulators and customers. And furthermore, they know the value that an integrated approach provides:



“Concerning sustainability, this also illustrates a more integrated approach with daily operations, such as ensuring that we possess life cycle assessment data when engaging in tenders and public procurement processes. This is certainly an aspect that we are monitoring closely and actively pursuing.”

Investment Priorities



Top Trend Themes

The following table represents the topics that are of most importance to the study respondents. Respondents ranked their top three, and the percentages show the share of respondents who placed each topic in their respective position.

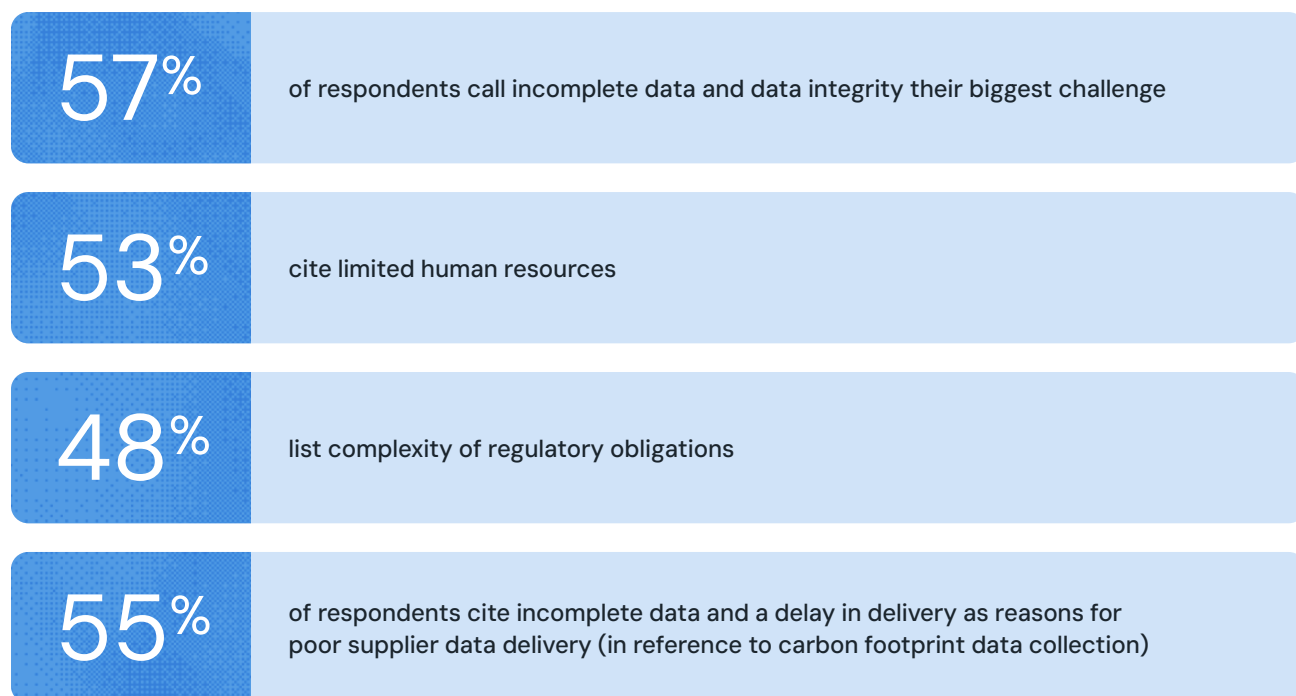
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3
Material product compliance and chemical management	34%	21%	12%
Integrating sustainability and product compliance into organizational culture	13%	12%	18%
Data quality	13%	9%	17%
ESG disclosures	14%	12%	10%
Product environmental footprint	5%	12%	15%
Supply chain transparency	2%	12%	11%
Aligning corporate strategies with geopolitical developments	11%	7%	6%
DPP	3%	8%	5%
Data ecosystems	3%	6%	6%



Challenges

Manufacturers face numerous challenges in managing product compliance and sustainability, and data quality and integrity outrank every other issue in the study, followed by limited human resources and the complexity of regulatory obligations. Interestingly, technological constraints rank last in terms of challenges. Companies are describing the symptoms of manual, disconnected processes without naming those processes as the cause, and the technology they plan to invest in risks landing on a data foundation that cannot support it.

Key Figures



The Tech Paradox

Our research concludes that the majority of companies continue to rely on manual processes while acknowledging the value of technology investment, and yet only **21% of respondents** cite operational limitations with their current approaches.

Read together, these findings point to an opportunity for companies to lean into technological advancement for their operations to help their business scale. They will require internal support (from leadership and other key stakeholders) to increase their data quality and help reserve resource capacity to support implementation.



Companies Know Technology & Expertise Are Critical for Scaling

The report finds **75% of respondents** work very closely with product compliance and sustainability, and **43% of respondents** would place technology at the top of their investment priorities. These two findings on the surface indicate a clear correlation between engagement with sustainability efforts and willingness to invest in software.

However, increased manual product compliance effort due to poor data quality and limited human resources to support programs can severely limit the time available to implement solutions that offer proactive risk mitigation. Companies may know technology and expertise is critical to scale, but not be in a position to move forward.



75%

of respondents work very closely with product compliance and sustainability



43%

of respondents would place technology at the top of their investment priorities

Assent's automated network helps you scale your compliance without increasing costs or headcount.

See How



Major Challenges

Incomplete data/data integrity	57%
Limited human resources	53%
Complexity of regulatory obligations	48%
Supplier administration	39%
Scope 3 emissions	37%
Significant administrative burden	34%
Insufficient prioritization within the organization	34%
Significant implementation expenses	25%
Prolonged reaction time	25%
Technological constraints/instruments	21%

The Interface Black Box: Poor Supplier Data Delivery

Respondents were asked why supplier data delivery falls short, and the answers show that suppliers are fighting an uphill battle to respond with the data their customers need.

The most-often cited reasons for poor data delivery are incompleteness and delays, followed by limited visibility into how data is produced. Our interview data indicates that suppliers sometimes hold back details to protect proprietary information, which is a commercial judgment that can damage customer trust. However, companies have more control over the next two reasons. Nearly half report that data requirements are unclear to suppliers, and two in five respondents point to the absence of automated processes for submitting responses.

Read together, these reasons describe a request process suppliers find difficult to navigate. Response quality improves when a request specifies which parts, substances, and reporting boundaries a declaration must cover, and when suppliers can submit once rather than repeatedly in different formats. Companies that receive incomplete data should ensure the requests they send are clear and complete.

Reasons for Poor Supplier Data Delivery

Incomplete data/data integrity	55%
Delay in data delivery	55%
Absence of transparency	47%
Ambiguous data requirements	45%
Absence of automated processes	40%
Data volume	38%
Inadequate data format	11%



“Data collection from primarily Chinese suppliers continues to be a hurdle. The data lacks reliability, as it frequently consists of incomplete and inaccurate information intended to safeguard proprietary knowledge.”





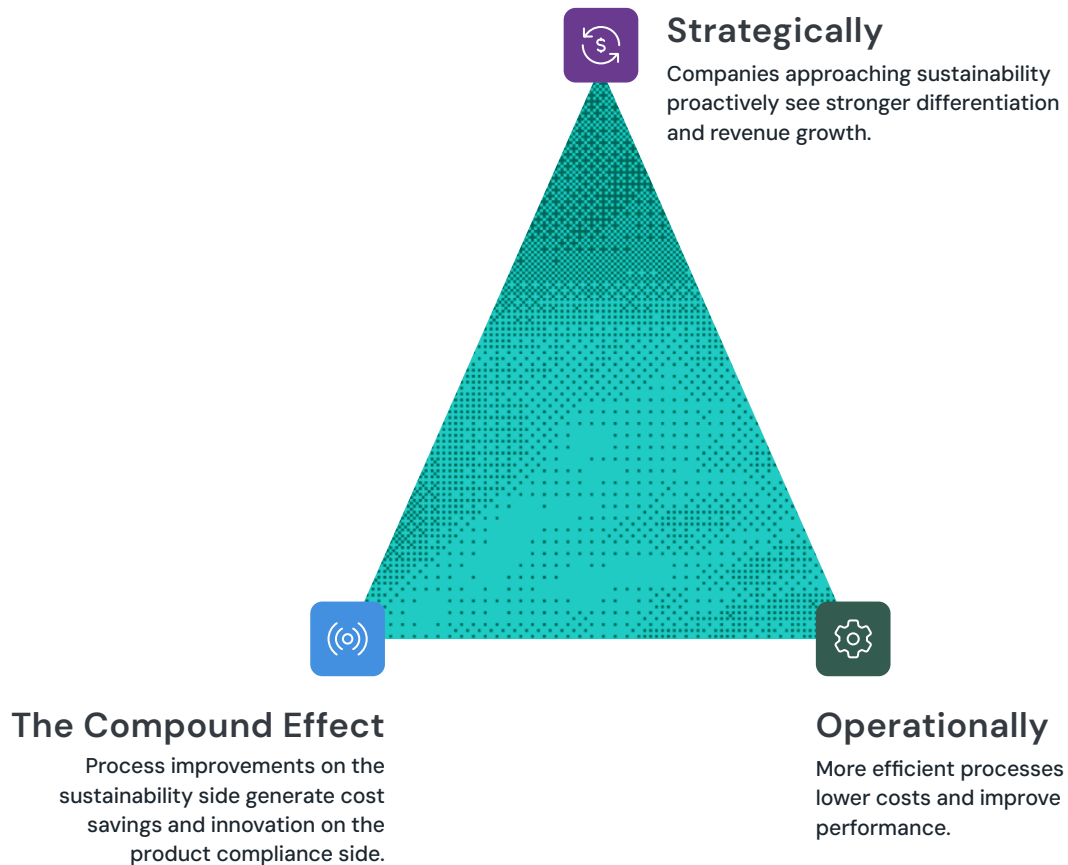
Opportunities

This report sheds light on the challenges companies face, but also the significant opportunities that exist for them within the product compliance and sustainability environment. Risk reduction and competitive advantage — two critical success factors for companies facing headwinds from regulators, investors, and their customers — are recognized benefits of proactive product compliance and sustainability efforts.



Two critical success factors for companies facing headwinds from regulators, investors, and their customers — are recognized benefits of proactive product compliance and sustainability efforts.

Sustainability and product compliance deliver measurable business value, and the research identifies three ways that value is realized. Each of these effects was statistically tested, not inferred:



The Compound Effect Is Unavoidable

Product compliance and sustainability requirements are converging, and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) demonstrates what that looks like in practice. Importers of covered goods must report embedded emissions, have those figures verified, and accept financial liability for inaccuracies. That data comes from the same suppliers already providing material declarations, so one supplier response now carries both a product compliance obligation and a carbon obligation.

Enhances Value in the Realm of Product Compliance

Risk mitigation	71%
Competitive advantage	36%
Enhancement of efficiency	23%
Expense minimization	23%
Employee engagement	17%
Innovative capacity	16%
Investor relations	14%
Revenue expansion	9%

Enhances Value in the Realm of Product Sustainability

Competitive advantage	46%
Risk mitigation	44%
Innovative capacity	30%
Employee engagement	28%
Expense minimization	26%
Enhancement of efficiency	26%
Investor relations	23%
Revenue expansion	17%

Where Significant Opportunity Lies

AI and automation top the list of opportunities companies see ahead of them, but only 10% have genuinely incorporated them into their systems. AI is only as strong as the data it draws on, and companies with integrated systems recognize its value more often, having strong supplier and product data for it to work from. Companies without integrated systems are running AI against fragmented data, which limits the reliability of the output and insights.

Key Figures



40%

of the total opportunity ranking breakdown is held by AI and automation



72%

of companies with integrated systems see AI as an opportunity



48%

of companies without integrated systems see AI as an opportunity

Opportunity Ranking

Circular economy	34%
Rationale for product innovation	32%
Sustainability disclosure	32%
Decarbonization	26%
Other (product intelligence)	15%

Exploring AI Utilization

Our data indicates that the manufacturing market's AI adoption is still at a low maturity level, scoring 2.14 out of 4 points, with larger companies exhibiting a more intensive use of AI. When it comes to perceiving product intelligence as a strategic opportunity, AI users report it approximately five times more frequently than non-users. The current use and adoption of AI serves as a preliminary indicator of future preparedness for product intelligence.



"AI is neither Copilot nor ChatGPT. It must be integrated within the systems. Without it, the potential is squandered."

Product intelligence benefits businesses most when product compliance and sustainability, program digitalization, and process improvements are managed together in one centralized platform. Where product compliance and sustainability remain separate functions, neither team sees the full picture, and product stewardship gets treated as a technical requirement to satisfy rather than a source of business insight.



"Artificial intelligence significantly aids in the management of vast quantities of data. We are currently implementing this technology and utilizing AI extensively. And that holds tremendous potential."

What Is Product Intelligence?

Product intelligence is connected, current, trusted data about the products, parts, and suppliers in a manufacturer or distributor's supply chain. It gives companies the data foundation they need to draw insights that help reduce business risk and make faster, more confident decisions.

Data

Connected

Current

Trusted

For

Products

Parts

Suppliers

AI Utilization

Regard AI as most significant market opportunity	40%
Companies with integrated systems that perceive AI as an opportunity	72% (vs. 48% without integrated systems)
Have genuinely incorporated AI into their processes	10%
Current AI maturity level in the market (out of 4)*	2.14
Statistical significance: company size vs. AI usage	$p < 0.05$
AI users vs. non-users viewing product intelligence as a strategic opportunity	21% vs. 4%

Scoring Current AI Maturity Level in the Market

To determine the current AI maturity level in the market, respondents were asked to rate how far AI is embedded in their regulatory compliance work on a four-point scale. With roughly a third reporting no AI in use at all and only a small share describing it as fully built into their processes, the average lands at 2.4.

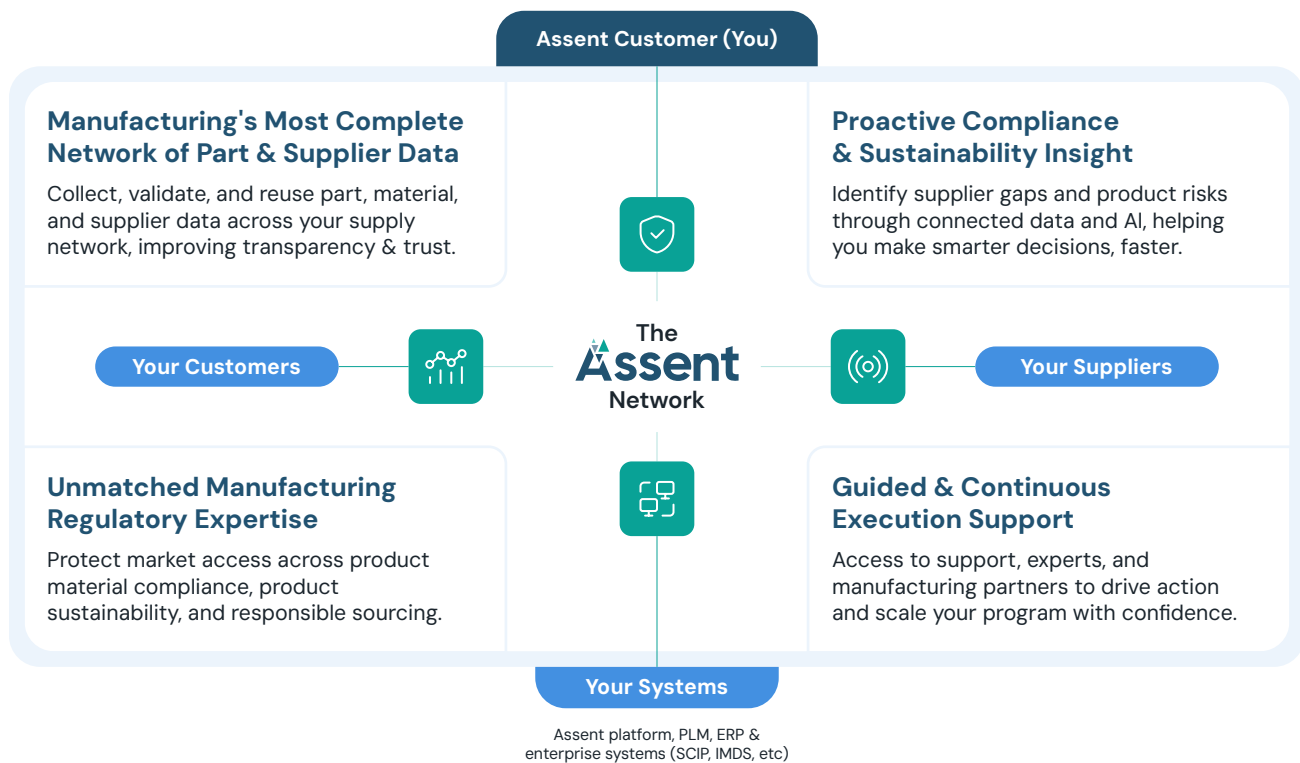


Conclusion

Manufacturers are deeply engaged with product compliance and sustainability, but manual processes and incomplete data are holding their programs back. Resources are stretched thin enough that there is little capacity to implement the technology and AI that would improve efficiency and reduce risk. Most companies identify AI and automation as the opportunity ahead of them. Few have the data foundation to act on it.

Companies today have an opportunity to build a data foundation that scales alongside their business needs and that informs their choices at the decision-making stage. Connected, dependable part, product, and supplier data is what makes AI worth deploying, and it is what turns product compliance and sustainability from a reactive response into proactive risk mitigation and a strong competitive advantage.

The Assent Network unifies part, product, and supplier data, ensuring it remains current and actionable as requirements and supply chains change. We deliver product intelligence and regulatory expertise, with AI built natively into our solution, to help companies make faster, smarter decisions and build products the world can trust.



Talk to our experts today.

Book a Demo





Appendix

Data Collection Timeframe

Between April and June 2026, 131 specialists and managers responded to the survey, which was offered in German, English, and Spanish. The fieldwork period for interviews extended from April 21 to June 8, 2026.

Interview Details

The interviews make up 5% of the total data, adding anonymized* expert insight that gives context and rationale to the survey's quantitative findings. Interview subjects spanned seven industries and three regions: the DACH countries, the rest of Europe, and companies operating globally. The sample set includes both regionally focused companies and global corporations, with revenues ranging from under \$50 million to over \$1 billion.

Note

Unless otherwise indicated, survey questions allowed respondents to select all applicable options. Percentages therefore represent the share of respondents selecting each option and may total more than 100%.

All data and participant quotations in this report are anonymous because contact names were not attached to the survey responses.

Participant Breakdowns

Industry

Automotive	36%
Electronic	18%
Mechanical engineering	17%
Miscellaneous	12%
Healthcare technology	4%

Sales Volume

< \$50 million	36%
\$50–250 million	20%
\$250–500 million	8%
\$500 million–1 billion	12%
> \$1 billion	24%

Position

Employees	45%
Department Chair	18%
Team Leader, Plant Engineering	15%
Project Coordinator	14%
Miscellaneous	2%
C-Level	1%

Expertise

Sustainability	26%
Product compliance	22%
Quality management	20%
Research and development	10%
Engineering	7%
Supply chain management	4%
Marketing	3%
Distribution	2%
Shopping	2%
Miscellaneous	2%
Logistics	1%

Region

DACH	42%
Rest of Europe	35%
Asia-Pacific	20%
North America	19%
South America	4%
Middle East	2%

Behind the Scenes



From left: Claus Wagner (Assent), Linda Di Gianvittorio (Assent) and Thomas Palm (IPOINT) receive the Product Compliance & Sustainability Trend Study from students at Pforzheim University

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Build Products the World Can Trust



Assent is the manufacturing industry's leading product intelligence network, providing the transparency and confidence manufacturers and distributors need to build and deliver products the world can trust.

525 Coventry Road
Ottawa, ON K1K 2C5
Canada

1-866-964-6931
assent.com