

The Auto Parts AI Discoverability Report

• StrikeTru Research

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How 10 auto parts merchants and 998 product pages perform when shoppers ask AI where to buy

By Vik Gundoju, Principal Consultant · Published 08/17/26 · 8 min read

Key findings at a glance

37.4%

of audited products had their own merchant named by an AI assistant as a top-5 place to buy them

3 of 10

merchants had **no machine-readable Product schema** on any audited page

0 of 10

merchants reached **Level 4 (AI Discoverable)** on our five-level maturity model

1.13 / 5

average score for **comparison content**, one of the weakest areas in the audit

1.44 / 5

average score for **FAQ content**; most Q&A modules were empty

< 2.0 / 5

score on **every one of 8 fitment-readiness dimensions**

Executive Summary

AI shopping assistants recommended the merchant that actually sells a part only 37.4% of the time. In StrikeTru's 2026 audit of 998 product pages across 10 auto parts merchants, an AI assistant was asked where a consumer would buy each exact product. Nearly two-thirds of the time it pointed shoppers elsewhere, usually to Amazon, eBay, RockAuto or CarParts.com, even when the audited merchant stocked the part.

The cause is not a lack of products or basic SEO. It is product data that AI systems cannot easily read, trust or compare. Across the audit we found the same fixable gaps:

- **Fitment hidden behind vehicle-selector dropdowns** instead of stated in readable text (every fitment dimension scored below 2.0 out of 5)
- **Almost no FAQ or comparison content** for an AI to quote when a shopper asks "will this fit?" or "which should I buy?"
- **Missing Product schema** at three of ten merchants, and incomplete schema at most others
- **Thin numeric specifications, reviews and video**, plus bot protection that blocked some pages from automated readers entirely

Auto parts is one of the hardest categories to get right. Fitment complexity, huge SKU counts and the split between OEM and aftermarket data make it unforgiving. That also makes it a strong test case: the gaps found here show up, in milder form, in most ecommerce categories.

About This Research

What we measured

StrikeTru audited **998 product pages** (about 100 per site) at **10 auto parts merchant websites**. Each product was scored on a 1–5 scale across four dimensions, then tested in an AI shopping assistant.

Dimension	What it covers
Product data completeness	24 fields, including titles, descriptions, features, benefits, specifications, weights and dimensions, attributes, images, video, reviews, ratings and pricing
AI readiness	FAQ availability, comparison content, buying guidance, semantic richness, natural-language coverage, product schema, knowledge-graph and vector-search readiness
Automotive fitment readiness	Year/Make/Model (YMM) coverage, compatibility depth, fitment notes and explanation quality, OEM cross-references, exploded views, repair jobs and symptom-to-part relationships
Technical schema	JSON-LD structured-data audit scored out of 100 for valid, complete Product schema
AI discoverability test	An AI assistant was asked: <i>"Where would a consumer buy this exact product?"</i> We recorded whether the audited merchant appeared among the top 5 recommended retailers, and at what rank

Study details

AI assistant(s) queried	Deep Seek V4 Flash / version "0424" / Using API Key
Query format	"Where are the top 5 places consumers go to buy the {product_name}?" "Then check your own list and report exactly where {brand} appears."
Audit window	July 7 – 18

Merchant selection	Merchants were selected based on their relevance to the aftermarket and truck-parts segments, breadth and complexity of product catalogs, and the potential impact of product discoverability on online customer research and purchase journeys.
Product sampling	Category stratified samples. Products were chosen from multiple categories.
Scoring approach	Automated crawl + AI assisted scoring with human review of sample responses
Detailed-text analysis	Of the 998 pages, 968 had complete auditor notes; percentages quoted from auditor notes use that base
Anonymization	Merchants are labeled A–J; product examples are described generically

Limitations

- AI answers vary with time, wording, location and personalization. Results describe the conditions of this test, not a permanent ranking.
- Ten merchants is a focused sample of the auto parts category, not a statistically representative view of all ecommerce.
- The findings show associations between product data quality and AI visibility; they do not prove that any single factor causes a recommendation.
- Sixteen pages returned a bot-verification screen instead of content; their scores reflect what an automated reader could see.

How AI Is Changing Product Discovery

What is AI product discoverability?

AI product discoverability is how likely AI search engines, shopping assistants and agents are to find, understand and recommend a merchant's product for a relevant shopper question. It depends on product data that machines can read, verify and compare, not only on keyword rankings.

For two decades, online product discovery followed one path: search, browse several sites, compare pages, read reviews, buy. Success depended on SEO, paid ads and a good storefront.

Generative AI adds a new path. Shoppers now ask full questions, such as *"What's the best brake pad set for towing under \$150?"*, and get a synthesized answer with recommended products and places to buy. The AI reads descriptions, specifications, attributes, reviews, structured data and compatibility information, then decides what to say. Often the shopper sees a recommendation before visiting any merchant's site.

The shift is already measurable

- **Traffic:** Adobe reported that traffic from generative AI sources to US retail websites rose **1,300% year over year** during the 2024 holiday season, and **39% of surveyed US consumers** had already used generative AI for shopping. [1] (<https://blog.adobe.com/en/publish/2025/03/17/adobe-analytics-traffic-to-us-retail-websites-from-generative-ai-sources-jumps-1200-percent>)
- **Checkout inside AI:** In September 2025, OpenAI launched Instant Checkout in ChatGPT with the open Agentic Commerce Protocol, co-developed with Stripe. [2] (<https://openai.com/index/buy-it-in-chatgpt/>)
- **Agentic commerce standards:** In January 2026, Google announced the Universal Commerce Protocol, built with Shopify, Etsy, Wayfair and Target, to power checkout for eligible listings in AI Mode and the Gemini app. [3] (<https://searchengineland.com/google-universal-commerce-protocol-467290>)

Four AI surfaces merchants now need to serve

Surface	What it does for the shopper
AI search summaries	Search engines synthesize answers, comparisons and recommendations above or instead of the traditional list of links
AI shopping assistants	Tools such as ChatGPT let shoppers describe needs in natural language, ask follow-ups and compare products across brands
Conversational commerce	AI guides the purchase by asking clarifying questions (vehicle, budget, use case) and narrowing options
Agentic commerce	AI agents act for the shopper: comparing prices, checking stock, confirming compatibility and increasingly completing the purchase

What AI needs from a product page

Content AI can explain and quote	Data AI can compare and verify
Product-specific descriptions and benefits	Structured specifications and standardized attributes
FAQs and how-to content	Weights, dimensions and measurements
Comparison and buying guidance	Fitment / compatibility stated as text
Reviews, images and SKU-specific video	Product schema: brand, identifiers, price, availability

When this information is missing, AI systems either overlook the product or fill the gap with a competitor’s page that does provide it. Many small and mid-sized merchants still manage product information in spreadsheets, disconnected systems or directly in the storefront. The fix is content and data work, not a platform migration.

What We Found: Nine Findings From the Auto Parts Audit

Finding 1: Most merchants are invisible to AI assistants for their own products

Across all 998 products, the audited merchant appeared among the AI’s top 5 recommended places to buy **only 37.4% of the time**. In the other 62.6% of cases, the AI recommended different retailers, almost always a large marketplace (Amazon, eBay) or a parts aggregator (RockAuto, CarParts.com), even when the audited merchant stocked the part.

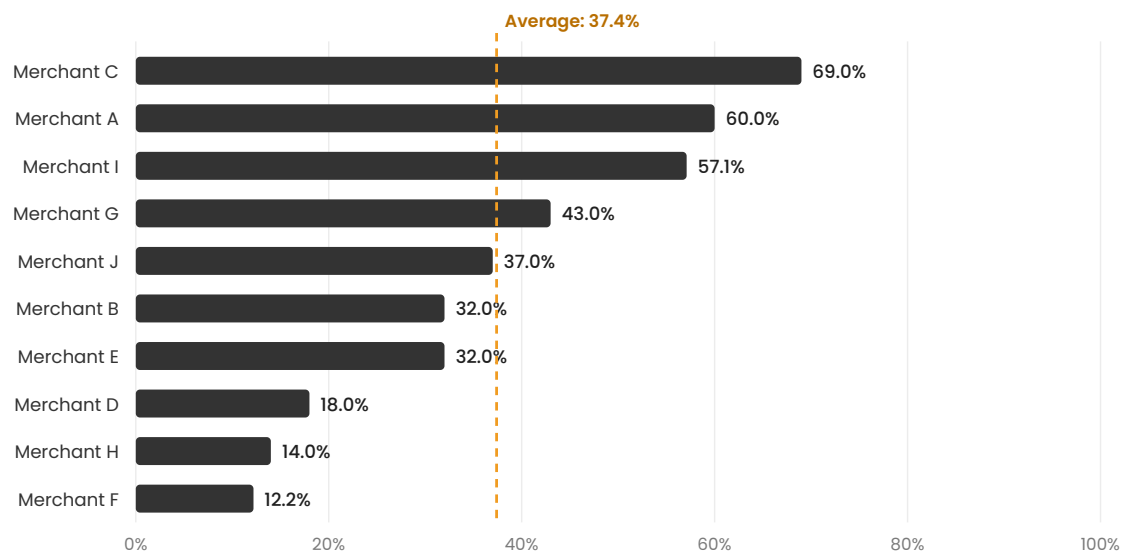


Figure 1. AI discoverability rate by merchant: share of each merchant’s audited products where the AI named that merchant in its top 5 places to buy. Dashed line = all-merchant average (37.4%).

► [View data table](#)

Technical readiness and AI outcomes don’t always move together. Merchant F had one of the best schema scores in the audit (95/100) but the lowest AI discoverability (12.2%). Merchant C had no detectable Product schema yet led the field (69.0%). Structured data appears necessary but not sufficient: brand

authority, content depth and third-party signals such as reviews, links and marketplace presence also shape whether an AI recommends a merchant directly.

Key takeaway

Being indexed is not the same as being recommended. AI assistants default to marketplaces unless a merchant's own product data gives them a clear, trustworthy reason not to.

Finding 2: Descriptions say what a part is, not why to buy it

Descriptions (**3.45/5**) and Features (**3.38/5**) were the strongest scores in the audit, but **Benefits scored only 2.70/5**. Descriptions usually restate what a part is (a brand paragraph or a spec list) rather than explain what it does for the buyer, which is the framing an AI needs to justify a recommendation.

One air-intake sensor listing had a description that was *“extremely weak, consisting only of the product title repeated.”* Generic brand boilerplate (for example, “meets or exceeds OEM standards”) stood in for product-specific copy on dozens of pages. An AI asked “why should I buy this part?” has nothing to draw on, so it uses a competitor's page instead.

Finding 3: Structured specifications thin out fast

Technical Specifications averaged **2.97/5**, but the more precise the data, the lower the score: Weights & Dimensions **2.18/5**, Measurement Attributes **2.00/5**. In the auditor notes (base: 968 products):

- **43.8%** of product pages had **no weight or dimension data at all**.
- **79.8%** had **no downloadable spec sheet, product sheet or installation PDF**.
- **30.4%** had **missing or meaningless image alt text**, such as one generic tag reused on 10–20 images.

Finding 4: FAQs are almost entirely absent

FAQ Availability averaged **1.44/5**, among the lowest scores in the audit. Nearly every platform had a Q&A module, but it was empty: *“No questions have been answered for this product yet.”* The tooling exists. What’s missing are the three to five answers a buyer, or an AI answering for one, needs before purchasing.

Finding 5: Fitment data is the category’s biggest blind spot

All eight automotive fitment-readiness dimensions scored **below 2.0/5**.

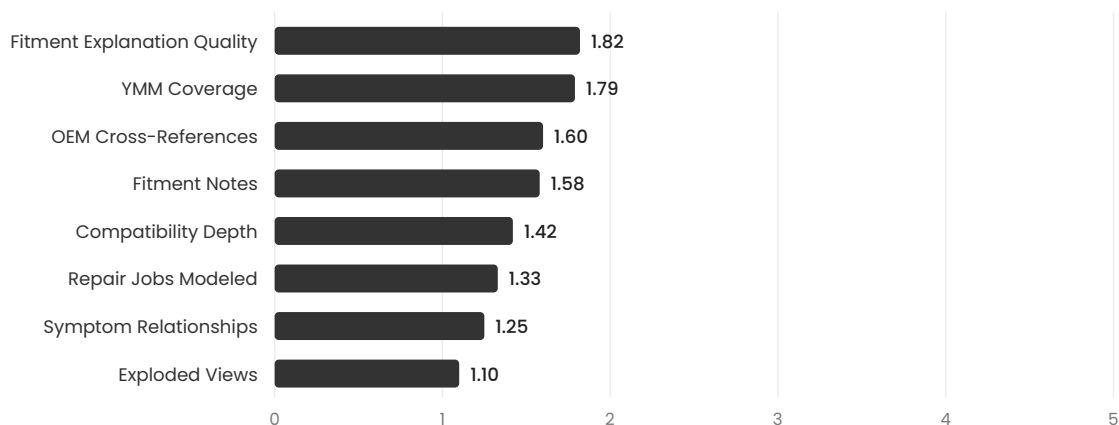


Figure 2. Automotive fitment readiness: average score across audited products (scale 1–5). Every dimension scored below 2.0.

Most merchants rely on an interactive “select your vehicle” tool rather than showing compatibility as readable text. That works for a person clicking dropdowns, but an AI system generally can’t operate a dropdown and needs the compatibility list stated on the page. **OEM Cross-References scored 1.60/5:** even when a part number appears, the OEM reference numbers shoppers and AI systems actually search for are usually missing.

Finding 6: Reviews and real product video are largely missing

Reviews averaged **1.54/5** and Ratings **1.76/5**. Videos averaged **1.31/5**, the lowest score among the 24 data-completeness fields, and the real gap is larger: on **49.9%** of products the only “video” detected was a tag-manager script that shared a video-like URL pattern, not a video at all.

Finding 7: Attributes are inconsistent, and content is built for one market

Attributes averaged **2.68/5**. Pages typically listed 3–5 basics (brand, condition, part number) but lacked material, finish, connector-type and compatibility attributes. **81.9%** of products had content only in English with no hreflang, and **41.3%** showed prices only in USD with no currency option.

Finding 8: Schema markup is either solid or completely absent

Seven of ten merchants had working Product schema, scoring 66.7–95 out of 100. **Three merchants (C, E and H) had no detectable Product schema on any audited page.** Among merchants with schema, these fields were most often missing:

Missing schema field	Occurrences across audited products
additionalProperty	564
shippingDetails	551
offers.priceValidUntil	367
itemCondition	234
sku / mpn / gtin	199
offers.url	199
brand	198

Finding 9: Some pages were unreadable to automated visitors

On **15 of 100** audited products at Merchant C and **1 of 100** at Merchant D, the audit tool received a bot-verification screen instead of the product page. This is an access problem, not a content problem, and it likely affects AI crawlers and shopping agents the same way. A merchant can have excellent product content and still be invisible if automated systems can't get past the front door.

The Eight Gaps Behind the 37% Headline

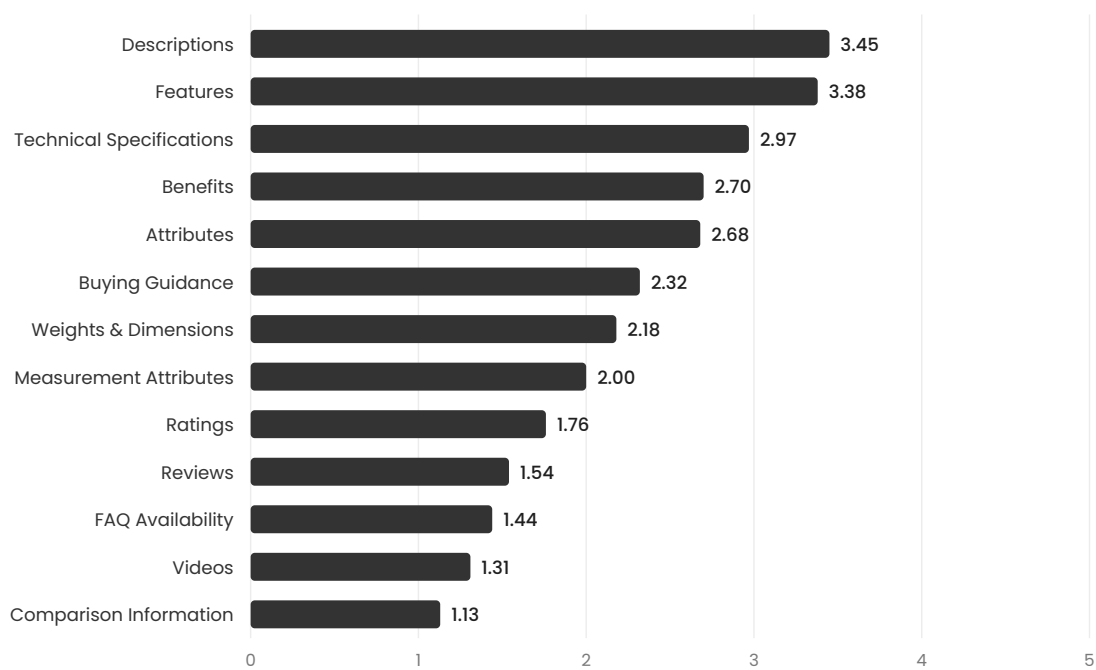


Figure 3. Product content scores, strongest to weakest (scale 1–5). The content AI assistants rely on most for answers scored lowest.

#	Gap	Score	Why it blocks AI discoverability	First fix
1	No FAQ content	1.44/5	Nothing on the page answers “will this fit?” or “how does it compare to OEM?”, so the AI quotes a competitor	Pre-populate 3–5 FAQs on top SKUs
2	No comparison or buying guidance	1.13 · 2.32/5	The AI can’t frame “which should I buy?” from your content	Add “how to choose” and “vs OEM” sections
3	Missing Product schema	3 of 10 at 0/100	Price, availability, brand and identifiers can’t be reliably extracted	Implement complete Product JSON-LD
4	Fitment not machine-readable	All 8 < 2.0/5	In auto parts, fitment is the product; dropdown-only data is effectively invisible	Publish YMM tables and OEM cross-refs as text
5	No real product video	1.31/5	Misses a growing multimodal signal of legitimacy and usage	SKU-specific video for top sellers
6	Sparse reviews and ratings	1.54 · 1.76/5	Less social proof for an AI weighing which retailer to recommend	Post-purchase review requests

#	Gap	Score	Why it blocks AI discoverability	First fix
7	Shallow numeric attributes	2.00–2.68/5	AI can summarize but can't compare on measurable specs	Standardize dimensions and key specs
8	Bot protection blocking access	16 pages blocked	A page automated readers can't load is equivalent to no page	Review bot rules; allow verified crawlers

The AI Discoverability Maturity Model

Use this five-level model to benchmark where a catalog stands today and what to do next.

Level	Typical characteristics	Business impact	Primary focus
1. Search Invisible	Thin descriptions, missing specs, few attributes, little structured data, duplicate manufacturer content	Hard to rank or cite; heavy reliance on paid ads	Build a complete, consistent catalog
2. SEO Ready	Optimized titles and meta, better descriptions, basic categories, some reviews, limited specs	Search visibility improves; AI still struggles with detailed questions	Enrich structured data; standardize attributes

Level	Typical characteristics	Business impact	Primary focus
3. Structured Catalog	Comprehensive attributes and specs, clear variants, consistent taxonomy, quality assets, product relationships	AI has far more context; operations become more efficient	Add AI-oriented content and richer schema
4. AI Discoverable	Rich descriptions, FAQs, comparison content, fitment as text, video, complete schema, buying guides, consistency across channels	Much more likely to appear in AI recommendations	Optimize for AI shopping with governance
5. Agent Ready	Real-time availability and pricing via APIs, product knowledge graphs, automated syndication, continuous governance	Products can be evaluated and bought by autonomous agents	Keep adapting to new AI commerce protocols

Where the audited merchants land

No merchant reached Level 4 or 5. Four merchants sit at Level 2 (C, E and H had no Product schema; I had a data-completeness average below 2.4/5) and six at Level 3 (A, B, D, F, G, J): working schema and stronger data, but missing FAQs, comparison content and fitment as text. The findings concentrate in the gap between Level 3 and Level 4.

How to Improve AI Discoverability

If you're at Level 1–2: build the foundation

- **Consolidate product data in a PIM** instead of editing it page by page in the storefront.
- **Standardize a core attribute set** (material, dimensions, condition, compatibility).
- **Implement complete Product schema.** For a merchant at 0/100, this closes a hard technical gap.

If you're at Level 3: build content for AI, not just for browsing

- **Write FAQs into product pages** instead of relying on an empty “ask a question” form.
- **Publish fitment as text** (YMM tables, fitment notes, OEM cross-references) alongside the vehicle selector.
- **Add comparison and buying guidance**, even a short “how to choose” or “vs OEM” section.
- **Produce SKU-specific video** for high-volume or high-return categories first.

If you're approaching Level 4: stay consistent and measure

- **Syndicate the same enriched data everywhere:** storefront, marketplaces, Google Merchant Center and AI shopping integrations.
- **Test AI discoverability monthly** with a fixed set of product queries.
- **Prepare for Level 5:** expose real-time price and availability through APIs as agentic checkout matures.

The auto parts fitment playbook

Do this	Why it helps AI discoverability
Generate fitment content from your PIM and ACES data	One governed source keeps storefront, marketplaces and AI-readable text consistent
Show a YMM compatibility table in HTML on each product page	AI systems can read and cite the vehicles a part fits without operating a dropdown
List OEM and interchange part numbers	Matches the identifiers shoppers and AI systems actually search for
Write fitment notes in plain language (qualifiers, position, exceptions)	Reduces wrong-fit recommendations and returns
Keep the vehicle selector as the shopper experience	People keep the convenience; machines get the data

Seven quick wins for the next 30 days

- 1 Check bot protection.** Make sure security rules aren't serving verification screens to legitimate search and AI crawlers.
- 2 Fix schema basics.** Add or complete Product schema with brand, sku/mpn/gtin, offers and itemCondition.
- 3 Answer the obvious questions.** Add 3–5 FAQs to your top 50–100 SKUs.

- 4 **Expose fitment.** Render YMM compatibility as a text table on your best-selling parts.
- 5 **Replace boilerplate.** Rewrite brand-paragraph descriptions on top sellers with benefit-led copy.
- 6 **Repair alt text.** Give each product image unique, descriptive alt text.
- 7 **Start measuring.** Ask AI assistants where to buy 20 of your products every month and track how often you're named.

The bottom line

Every gap in this report traces back to one root cause: **product data built for a person scrolling a page, not for a machine answering a question.** None of the ten merchants needed a platform migration to move up the maturity model. They needed to treat product data as a strategic asset rather than a by-product of the storefront.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is AI product discoverability?

AI product discoverability is how likely AI search engines, shopping assistants and agents are to find, understand and recommend your product for a relevant question. It depends on complete, structured, machine-readable product data such as specifications, fitment, FAQs and schema, as well as trust signals like reviews.

Why don't AI assistants recommend my store for parts I sell?

In our audit, AI assistants named the merchant only 37.4% of the time. They tend to default to marketplaces when a merchant's own page lacks readable fitment, FAQs, comparison content, complete schema or reviews, or when bot protection blocks automated access.

Does Product schema guarantee AI visibility?

No. Schema helps machines extract price, availability, brand and identifiers, but it isn't sufficient on its own. One merchant scored 95/100 on schema yet had the lowest AI discoverability rate (12.2%).

How should auto parts merchants show fitment to AI?

Publish fitment as readable text on the product page: a Year/Make/Model compatibility table, fitment notes and OEM cross-reference numbers, ideally generated from PIM and ACES data. Keep the vehicle selector for shoppers, but don't rely on it alone.

What is the fastest way to improve AI discoverability?

Start with access and basics: make sure bot rules don't block legitimate crawlers, complete your Product schema, and add three to five FAQs and a readable fitment table to your best-selling SKUs. Then measure monthly.

What is agentic commerce, and why does it matter for auto parts?

Agentic commerce is when AI agents research, compare and buy on a shopper's behalf. For auto parts, an agent must confirm compatibility before buying, so machine-readable fitment becomes essential.

How can I test my own catalog?

Ask AI assistants where to buy a sample of your products and record how often you're named, or request StrikeTru's Automotive Catalog & Fitment Assessment, which uses the framework in this report.

How to cite this report

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About StrikeTru

StrikeTru helps auto parts manufacturers, distributors and retailers turn fragmented product data into a foundation for commerce today and AI-driven discovery next, covering PIM/PXM implementation, fitment and ACES/PIES data management, product data enrichment, and B2B and B2C commerce on Akeneo, Shopify, BigCommerce, Adobe Commerce and Miva. StrikeTru also offers TruPIM, its own PIM for growing businesses. Related:

Automotive PIM & Fitment Solutions

(<https://striketru.com/services/automotive-pim-pxm-implementations-for-scalable-commerce-operations/>) · AI Product Discoverability

(<https://striketru.com/services/ai-product-discoverability/>)

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