infor

5 ways to succeed with proactive mass customization

Mass customization is quickly moving from a niche business option to table stakes for manufacturers wanting to align with today's customers who expect highly customized products.

Speaking in 1909 about the future of Ford Model T cars, Henry Ford remarked, "Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black." That limited view didn't prevail long as choices in color soon came to be a key selling point. Ever since, manufacturers have been balancing the pros and cons of personalized products, frequently bowing to customer demands—even in the business-to-business landscape.

Manufacturers have adjusted operational processes—developing flexible shop floor operations and configure-price-quote (CPQ) capabilities that support customization, while retaining efficiency and productivity. Manufacturers can deploy modular designs, leverage assemble-on-demand strategies, and use web or app configuration tools to step customers through an engaging selection and quoting process.

The benefits pay off quickly, as customers perceive extra value and are often willing to pay more for customization. Customization also builds loyalty, encouraging repeat sales. In an increasingly crowded and competitive market, product customization is now becoming critical for success.

Here are five steps companies can take to meet increased demand for customized products.

1. Align with customer expectations

Market and product research indicates that **consumers expect and will wait for product personalization**, from fashion to automobiles. This passes over into the business-to-business market, with purchasing agents also expecting the same level of service.

Products can be personalized by 3D printing, made-to-measure design, screen printing, engraving, spray painting, interchanging accessories, upgrading details, packaging that combines products and related tools or accessories, and more.

Each of these techniques can add value for the customer.

2. Deploy a CPQ solution to expedite the selling process

Configure price quote software steps a customer through the selection options, guiding them to make logical choices with the product's specifications. The solution then provides a quote, a rendering, and expected delivery timeframe.

CPQ software can also act as a recommendation engine, helping upsell or guide customers to their next purchase, while delivering greater business value at a fraction of the cost of engaging an engineer to create one-off drawings and estimates. Freeing the engineering and sales teams of managing configured quotes allows them to focus on more complex queries or deal with high-value customers.

3. Deliver customized results through modular automation

Some manufacturers have turned to modular design components as a way to produce more options for customers.

A modular "building block" approach allows the manufacturer to expand product variety without adding excessive complexity. The components, such as brake systems and drive chains, can be produced, inventoried, and then assembled on demand. In the assembly stage, the customer choices in accessories or cosmetic items, like seat colors, are applied.

Assemble-on-demand processes require advanced ERP solutions to help manage the scheduling, inventory, and workflows. Fortunately, the right business process management platform can help you consolidate all the details into a format that managers can easily understand and control.

4. Integrate for better execution

To make product customization a workable reality, manufacturers need to bridge the gap between configuration and operations. Integrating a CPQ solution with the shop floor operational system delivers a series of benefits including:

- Faster quotes
- More efficient manufacturing and assembly
- Accurate pricing and billing
- Ongoing process improvement
- Support for product innovation and more options

Companies can also tear down the silos that separate sales, engineering, and manufacturing, creating a seamless series of processes across the business that deliver operational harmony, reduce waste, and control costs.

5. Differentiate your brand on experience

As competition increases and lower-end competitors try to imitate, it is harder to differentiate on product alone. Delivering a strong customer experience with great engagement and highly personalized content is key.

By creating an interactive customization and ordering experience, manufacturers can stand out by giving customers what they want. By giving customers tools that they configure products themselves, they develop a greater sense of ownership with what they design. And customers taking the time to build their products will have a greater attachment to them and a stronger connection with your brand.

Summary

In the wake of COVID, changing consumer perceptions and market conditions force manufacturers to be even more selective of how they reach customers, anticipate their needs, and suggest likely purchases. This level of hyper-personalization requires manufacturers to incorporate advanced analytics driven by artificial intelligence (AI) and customer relationship management (CRM) tools at the most granular level.

Visit **infor.com** to get more information on improving the buying experience for customers.

LEARN MORE ↗

Follow us:

641 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10011

INF-2403679-en-US-0222-3