



## EXECUTIVE BRIEF

# 5 tactics industrial manufacturers can borrow from the makers of consumer goods

Create high-impact customer experiences to foster brand loyalty

Manufacturers have always had to find ways to seek new ways to attract, inspire, and motivate potential buyers. Today is no different, but what has changed is the ability for manufacturers to leverage technology to create memorable experiences. This paradigm shift toward technology-driven customer alignment is prevalent among business-to-business (B2B) organizations, as well as consumer markets. Tactics range from introducing high-tech components to offering product personalization.

These efforts can be highly disruptive, however, as the pressure to compete often pushes manufacturers outside their comfort zone. On top of that, resources like microprocessor chips are already in short supply, adding to market challenges and complexity. Fortunately, modern software solutions can help industrial manufacturers create memorable experiences for customers—while also helping to ensure operational efficiency and protect margins.

### **Change the way you sell**

The COVID-19 pandemic and consequential supply chain disruption forced many manufacturers to change the way they sell to their customers. E-commerce, supply chain visibility, mass customization, and selling directly to the consumer are just some of the tactics that manufacturers adopted or enhanced in an attempt to overcome disruption. The pandemic also significantly expanded the use of contactless purchases and automated online processes, which have proven to be highly flexible, ultraefficient, and preferred by many customers. As a result, it's unlikely consumers, retailers, or manufacturers will advocate for a return to previous ways of conducting commerce, even as markets stabilize in a post-COVID “new normal.”

To remain relevant and keep pace with changing expectations, manufacturers must turn attention to building customer-centric strategies.

## Model B2B customer alignment on successful consumer brands

Industrial manufacturers of machinery and equipment, as well as manufacturers in the high-tech, automotive, and aerospace and defense industries, can model their initiatives after highly successful tactics pioneered by manufacturers and distributors in consumer industries (such as fashion, retail, and food and beverage). Here are five common tactics that form the foundation of a customer-centric strategy:

### 1. Offer highly configured products

Configuration, price, quote (CPQ) tools guide a customer through personalizing a product, while adhering to predefined options and specification parameters. CPQ tools can also provide a rendering of the finished product, helping the customer to visualize the item with the selected features and specifications. Then, 3D renderings can show the product in context. Not only does the automated process speed quoting, but it can also help to standardize price quotes and prevent errors. CPQ solutions that support visual selling, ease the quoting burden placed on engineers and help customers feel confident about their personalized purchases.

### 2. Collaborate with customers

Customers, including organizations that buy industrial equipment or high-tech components, expect to be able to provide input on product designs, innovations, and what new features should be introduced to the product line—particularly new high-tech applications that they feel should be priorities. Some product innovations that are seeing rapid development include sensors that measure environmental conditions, GPS tracking, and security monitoring.

Manufacturers can benefit from working with top customers and leaders in their target markets to help set product roadmaps and prioritize new features and capabilities. By measuring and sharing outcomes, a team-based approach can be used to help determine which new innovations drive measurable value. Technology can enable manufacturers to collaborate with customers in many ways, such as online portals, customer relationship management solutions, and communication tools that track conversations in real time. These tools can allow manufacturers, suppliers, and buyers to discuss ideas—securely and while protecting intellectual property.

### 3. Improve speed and reliability of delivery

The retail world's speed of delivery—often in the form of next-day delivery—is influencing the industrial commercial and business world as well. Speed of delivery and time to value are important key industry indicators in the B2B market. Not only do customers expect goods on time, but they also demand that the shipments arrive as-ordered and stand up to all quality and regulation compliance. Buyers today tend to be intolerant of delays and errors and will quickly change sources if disappointed.

Manufacturers can step up their speed of delivery and order accuracy by turning to modern, end-to-end, enterprise resource planning solutions that help monitor and streamline the entire production process—from ordering raw resources to scheduling work crews to eliminating shop floor delays. Manufacturing execution systems can help synchronize shop floor processes to reduce bottlenecks and delays. Solutions that support quality control also help ensure products ship as-ordered and meet expectations for value and performance. Investments in shop floor technology yield reliability, product consistency, increased productivity, and efficiency—key ingredients for customer satisfaction.

### 4. Enable sales growth through e-commerce

Buyers, including those who procure capital intensive goods, prefer to do their initial research online. This applies to the procurement of many types of complex goods, such as construction machinery, medical imaging equipment, and in-plant assets (like overhead doors, conveyors, and forklifts). Setting up e-commerce platforms helps potential customers conveniently conduct preliminary research, compare specifications, and explore expected delivery dates. E-commerce helps buyers progress through the sales journey at their own pace, letting them set their decision-making priorities.

Self-service e-commerce portals also reduce the cost of sales. Customers can do their own research on product features, thereby reducing the time sales teams need to allocate to nurture a prospect, provide education, and support product comparisons. For manufacturers, data can be collected from these online tools to provide valuable insights into buying influences.

## 5. Deliver aftermarket service

Providing customer service can be time-consuming and costly, but it's one of the most critical tactics for enhancing customer loyalty. Modern aftermarket service solutions help manufacturers streamline dispatch of technicians and speed first-call resolution rates. They can also help manufacturers manage warranties, service agreements, depot repair, and track parts used and as-serviced history. These solutions also help ensure the right technicians are dispatched to the right place and time with the right tools and replacement parts. The use of third-party logistics service providers for delivery, set up, and calibration of large equipment also help drive customer satisfaction.

## Build a solid foundation

As manufacturers face fierce global competition, improving customer alignment can be valuable in fostering lasting relationships and brand loyalty. Manufacturers can look to consumer products for examples of tactics proven successful in enhancing brand loyalty and creating positive buying experiences for customers.

Modern, agile software solutions can help manufacturers transition to a customer-centric, go-to-market approach. Offering configured products, design collaboration, reliable delivery, e-commerce, and aftermarket service are among the highly effective tactics manufacturers can adopt. These tactics provide a sound foundation for building relationships with customers and moving the buying process away from price points. Manufacturers investing in modern software can use technology to better align with customers, deliver products with value, and foster a positive buying experience. Investing in customer satisfaction can lead to bottom-line results.

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641 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10011

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