



A CUSTOMER STATE OF MIND

TRANSFORMING SELLING BEHAVIORS IN THE MANUFACTURING MARKET

The manufacturing and industrial sectors are transforming significantly, driven by evolving customer expectations and technological advancements. Traditional product-centric selling approaches are giving way to more consultative, sense-making strategies. Additionally, companies that offer highly customized solutions increasingly involve engineering teams early in the sales process, reshaping governance structures and enhancing internal collaboration. This white paper explores these two interconnected trends and their impact on businesses within the industry.

Pace of change

Despite the advancements mentioned above, many manufacturing companies remain conventional, adhering to old habits. While top management often understands the necessity for behavioral change, implementing these changes proves complicated. Value propositions frequently remain as product catalogs without reference models tailored to different stakeholders. Sales efforts focus heavily on product push, targeting technical buyers rather than economic decision-makers.

"ADAPTING TO NEW SALES METHODOLOGIES IS ESSENTIAL, AS CLIENTS NOW EXPECT COMPANIES TO UNDERSTAND THEIR UNIQUE CHALLENGES AND OFFER TAILORED SOLUTIONS RATHER THAN SIMPLY SELLING PRODUCTS. "

Consequently, the sales approach needs to evolve. Companies must transition from merely presenting product features to developing comprehensive value propositions that address the diverse needs of various stakeholders. This shift requires a deep understanding of both technical and economic buyers, ensuring that sales strategies are aligned with their client's broader business objectives. In summary, the industry is at a crossroads where traditional methods must give way to innovative, customer-centric approaches.

This white paper aims to provide insights into these changes and offer a roadmap for companies to adapt and thrive in this new landscape.

The shift from product push to a sense-making approach

Historically, the manufacturing and industrial markets have relied heavily on technical selling. Sales representatives focused on providing extensive product information, emphasizing technical specifications, and demonstrating product capabilities. The primary goal was to sell the products based on specifications.

The emergence of sense-making selling

Today's customers demand more than just product information; they seek guidance in making informed decisions. The sense-making approach shifts the focus from pushing products to helping customers understand their needs and the solutions available.

This involves:

- **Understanding customer challenges:** Sales teams must deeply understand the customer's business challenges and goals. This aligns with the industry trend towards customer-centricity, where personalized solutions are paramount.
- **Providing insightful solutions:** Sales representatives offer insights into how the product can solve specific problems rather than simply presenting product features.
- **Collaborative decision-making:** Engaging customers in a dialogue to explore options and co-create solutions, fostering a sense of partnership and trust. To make that happen, investing in selling skills is crucial.



According to a Harvard Business Review article by Brent Adamson, the best sales reps have turned the challenge of information overload into a prime selling opportunity by helping customers prioritize perspectives, quantify trade-offs, and deconflict competing viewpoints.

"INFORMATION HOLDS POWER, BUT ONLY WHEN IT CAN BE INTERPRETED EFFECTIVELY. WE NEED TO HELP CUSTOMERS NAVIGATE THE NOISE AND ACHIEVE CLARITY."

Early involvement of engineering in the selling process

Many companies in the manufacturing and industrial sectors offer highly customized products and solutions. These offerings often require significant engineering input to meet specific customer requirements. Traditionally, engineering teams were brought relatively late in the sales process, primarily for technical validation and implementation.

Benefits of early engineering involvement

Involving engineering teams early in the sales process offers several advantages:

- **Accurate solution design:** Engineers can help design technically feasible solutions that meet customer needs.
- **Enhanced customer confidence:** Early engagement with engineering demonstrates a commitment to delivering tailored solutions and building customer trust.
- **Streamlined processes:** Collaboration between sales and engineering reduces the risk of miscommunication and project delays.



According to Gartner's 2019 Buyer Survey, the effectiveness of different sales strategies varies significantly in reducing customer skepticism. The "Sense-Making" approach (in opposition to giving information), which helps customers navigate and prioritize information, proves most effective, with 61.4% of customers being less skeptical. Engineering teams play a crucial role by providing technical insights and ensuring feasible solutions, enhancing customer confidence and satisfaction.

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Impact on governance structure and internal collaboration

Integrating engineering into sales requires redefining key decision points to ensure timely and effective collaboration.

Key stages include:

- **Initial customer engagement:** Sales and engineering collaborate to understand customer needs and define project scope.
- **Solution development:** Joint efforts to design and validate the proposed solution, ensuring it meets technical and business requirements.
- **Proposal and negotiation:** Collaborative creation of proposals that reflect technical feasibility and business value.
- **Implementation planning:** Coordinated planning for project execution, involving both sales and engineering teams.



Enhancing internal collaboration

To facilitate this integration, companies must adopt robust collaboration tools and processes.

This includes:

- **Cross-functional teams:** Establishing teams that include members from sales, engineering, and account management to foster continuous collaboration. This aligns with the industry trend of collaborative innovation, where different departments work together to co-create solutions.
- **Clear roles and responsibilities:** Defining roles and responsibilities to avoid overlaps and ensure accountability at each stage of the sales process.
- **Effective communication channels:** Utilizing platforms that enable real-time communication and information sharing across departments.

"EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION IS THE BACKBONE OF SUCCESSFUL PROJECT EXECUTION. WHEN SALES AND ENGINEERING WORK TOGETHER FROM THE START, CHALLENGES CAN BE ANTICIPATED AND ADDRESSED PROACTIVELY."

Conclusion

The shift from product focus to sense-making selling and the early involvement of engineering in the sales process are crucial developments for companies in the manufacturing and industrial sectors. These changes align with evolving customer expectations and enhance the ability to deliver customized, high-value solutions. By adopting these approaches, companies can improve their competitive position, build stronger customer relationships, and drive sustainable growth.



Key sources:

1. **Motion5's first impression scan and 22 Years of Experience:** Recent research data (2024) and extensive experience helping industrial companies transition to sense-making selling approaches.
2. **Harvard Business Review article by Brent Adamson:** Insights into sense-making selling and the impact of information overload on B2B customers.
3. **Gartner reports; 2019 Buyer survey and from buying journeys to buying Jobs 2021:** Analysis of customer-centric strategies and early involvement in the customer buying journey.
4. **Interviews with Industry Leaders:** Insights from CEOs and VPs in the manufacturing and industrial sectors.
5. **Market research on digital transformation:** Trends and data on the impact of digital technologies in manufacturing and industrial markets.



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