

Rethinking the Buyer Journey:

The Growing Role of CPQ in Customer Experiences





What are you doing to deliver a more engaged, consultative, and solutions-focused buying experience for your customers?

That's a question all manufacturers of complex products need to ask themselves.

Why? Because more solution buyers are seeking alternate routes on their buying journeys. They want more digital engagement and collaboration. More solutions built to achieve targeted outcomes. More expertise delivered where it's most needed.

The capabilities required to support this new, more satisfying buyer journey are within reach—and Configure, Price, Quote (CPQ) software is playing a key role in delivering them.

This eBook explores how and why buyers and the buying process are changing, and the ramifications for manufacturers seeking to improve their go-to-market agility, achieve greater competitive differentiation, and drive sales.

Buyers and the buying process have changed

The title of a recent Forrester podcast summarized the situation well: [Generational Shifts Are Disrupting Traditional Business Buying Behaviors And Necessitate Reevaluating Go-To-Market Strategies](#).

Millennials and Gen Z now comprise 64% of B2B buyers—and are “turning the business buying process on its head.”

As digital natives, these buyers have never known a world without the Internet or smartphones. In addition to demanding more self-serve transaction channels, they tend to be active information seekers who go to more sources and rely more on third-party resources than those provided by vendors. **They are also about 20% more demanding about the buying experience than their older peers.**

Other analysts echo these findings. According to Gartner’s® [Future of Sales](#) report, over 80% of the buying process now occurs without engaging a vendor—up from 67% just three years ago. The report also finds that nearly 50% of today’s buyers would prefer never to interact with a salesperson.

With 80% of B2B sales interactions now happening over digital channels, adoption of a buyer-centric digital sales model is essential. Without that, complex product salespeople could find themselves eliminated from consideration before they even secure a face-to-face meeting with their prospective buyers.

Increased commoditization is driving new differentiators

Along with changing buyer preferences, manufacturers are under pressure to further differentiate their solutions in a competitive market. While product innovation has always fueled differentiation, it can be short-lived. Game-changing solutions that alter the competitive landscape are often destined to become commodity products, as once-exclusive features become commonplace and competitors bring their own variations to market.

Companies are therefore seeking new ways to differentiate and achieve an advantage. These include:

Offering outcome-based solutions delivered as managed services

As [Deloitte](#) explains, some manufacturers are seeking differentiation by transitioning their role from “equipment provider” to “solution provider that improves business outcomes.” This typically involves bundling a product with a set of recurring managed services. Shifting the focus to business outcomes requires the manufacturer to change the conversation with the buyer to be more about their specific needs and expectations than product specifications. Because the managed services model fosters closer, longer-term relationships between manufacturers and customers, they can provide more lasting differentiation.

Engaging the buyer in more effective, efficient, and trusted ways

Manufacturers can also differentiate themselves by the kind of experience they provide to the buyer during the buying process. This goes far beyond simply making it more convenient to obtain information; it must also be a seamless interaction that leverages expertise and builds trust. As McKinsey’s [Future of B2B Sales](#) report put it, “B2B companies need to adopt a customer-first approach and create personalized, intuitive buying journeys that attract, excite, convert, and keep customers loyal.”



Consultative selling requires maximized expertise in buyer interactions

As noted above, two-way trust-building conversations (both face-to-face and digital) require sellers to maximize consultative expertise in **every** buyer interaction. That means manufacturers now must support not only Guided Selling but also Guided Buying.

Whereas Guided Selling is all about provide salespeople with the information they need to navigate the sales process, Guided Buying is focused on providing everything the buyer needs to navigate their buying process. That includes:

Partnering with buyers to arrive at the optimum solution. This means translating requirements into solution capabilities, explaining the pros and cons of trade-offs, providing recommendations based on an understanding of desired outcomes, and more.

Aiding buyers in navigating the range of services needed to build their solution. With services comprising a growing percentage of a total solution (rather than a post-sale add-on), expertise is needed to guide selection and terms.

Working in concert with buyers to achieve their sustainability goals and fulfill regulatory requirements. This requires regulatory, reporting, and governance knowledge that buyers may not have.

Providing visualization tools so buyers can preview how the final solution will look and behave.

These resources need to be available whenever a buyer requests it via every channel of interaction the buyer prefers.

A McKinsey survey showed that **72% of respondents believe a consistent experience across channels is required to earn their loyalty.**

More than one-third of the industrial manufacturing knowledge base is lost every year

Just when prospects are seeking more expertise in their buying interactions, a brain drain in Industrial Manufacturing is depleting that expertise and impairing competitiveness.

Employee turnover in Industrial Manufacturing was 37% in 2023.

While that is the lowest in three years, it still means that many manufacturers can expect both their sales and engineering organizations to turn over completely within 10 years.

Go-to-market agility is of utmost importance

Manufacturing organizations have long been focused on accelerating speed to market—shortening product cycles, issuing more frequent and timely updates, and tightening the supply chain.

However, there is now a growing focus on “speed to sales”—finding opportunities to remove inefficiencies and gaps in the sales process to further improve go-to-market agility. Among the strategies to accomplish that are:

- **Capturing data** about buyer interactions in real time and using it to make better decisions about sales strategy, marketing strategy, product design, suppliers, and more.
- **Enabling channels** much faster. This can involve providing sales teams and partners with tools that reduce the need for long onboarding or technical training before they can sell; enabling real-time updates to product configurations so sales teams need not wait for engineering; and/or providing buyers with more self-service capabilities that allow them to explore and research independently.
- **Driving adoption** of more consultative conversations with buyers within the GTM team as quickly as possible.

The question then becomes: What is the best way to employ these strategies to improve GTM agility?

That loss of expertise—amassed over years of day-to-day problem-solving and hands-on experience—leaves companies both under-resourced and short on value delivery to customers. Problems take longer to solve, expert resources become over-taxed, training programs fall short, and customer satisfaction can suffer.

For these reasons, manufacturing companies are urgently seeking to codify and preserve enterprise knowledge regarding product maintenance and service, engineering, regulation compliance, and the competition. Solutions that preserve that expertise and put it within easy reach are needed.



The solution is differentiated buyer engagement

The key to addressing all these pressing issues—changing buyers, a changing buying process, the expertise shortage, and the need for greater, more lasting competitive differentiation—is differentiated buyer engagement.

Simply put, differentiated buyer engagement means creating a unique buying experience that delivers more value and shares vital expertise to better support the customer on their buying journey—and build trust.

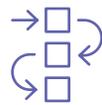
To achieve differentiated buyer engagement, organizations need to bring the capabilities, knowledge, and insight of their most gifted solution consultants to every buyer interaction.

That means:



Start with outcomes, not features

Collaborate on the product configuration by working backward from the desired outcome of the solution—what it is intended to achieve and all the factors to consider—rather than beginning with product features and functionality.



Services are integral, not add-ons

Make services a key component of the total solution by guiding the buyer during the buying journey to select the appropriate services for their unique needs.



Ensure pricing consistency and optimization

The more complex the product, the greater the risk of pricing issues. Ensuring pricing consistency and optimization across all buyers and interactions helps to build trust while supporting competitiveness and protecting margins.



Bring the solution to life through visualization and layout

Make the solution more tangible and give the buyer an opportunity to experience it virtually to better appreciate its functionality and understand the impact of any trade-offs.



Highlight the sustainability impact

Support the buyer's regulatory requirements by highlighting and quantifying the solution's sustainability impact and how it supports compliance.

Delivering on all those requirements is a challenge when expertise is in short supply. That's why differentiated buyer engagement also requires manufacturers to capture and codify their internal expertise and amplify it using AI.

Furthermore, differentiated buyer engagement cannot be stovepiped. Manufacturers need to provide these capabilities across all buyer engagement channels (digital, inside sales, outside sales) in a coordinated, consistent fashion.

Finally, differentiated buyer engagement requires that manufacturers have the capability to capture and analyze all data from every buyer interaction across channels to glean insights to guide planning and drive continuous improvement across the enterprise.

The new buyer journey begins and ends with CPQ

While the implementation of differentiated buyer engagement touches multiple organizations across the enterprise and requires a reworking of the GTM strategy, it is well within reach. CPQ is the point of the spear, providing the means to drive the effort to successful completion. Here's why:

The foundation is already there

CPQ is a key part of the existing GTM strategy, providing a solid base to build upon.

CPQ works seamlessly with existing systems

CPQ is designed to work in concert with ERP, CRM, SCM, CAD, PLM, and BI systems, enabling data-sharing and collaboration across the infrastructure to support a holistic approach to buyer engagement.

CPQ is on the front line of buyer engagement

CPQ is uniquely positioned at the critical touchpoints where manufacturers and buyers meet. It provides the ideal means to create a smarter, simpler, and more streamlined buyer experience.

Choosing a CPQ partner for the new buyer journey

The CPQ category spans a broad range of vendors and capabilities. Within this landscape, Tacton is recognized as both a proven solution provider and a visionary technology leader with a dedicated focus on the needs of complex product manufacturers.

For more than 25 years, manufacturers of all sizes have trusted Tacton to enable them to build more streamlined, agile, and engaging buyer experiences for their complex products. The company counts more than 100 global manufacturers among its customers and has received accolades from Gartner®, Frost & Sullivan, and other industry thought leaders and analysts for its transformative solutions.

Among CPQ vendors, Tacton has been named a Leader in the Gartner® Magic Quadrant™ for CPQ Applications, rated highest on ability to execute. Tacton is ready to support the new buyer journey, offering a buyer engagement platform that transforms how manufacturers deliver complex products to market. **Contact us today to start the conversation.**



Tacton is a leading SaaS company trusted by global manufacturers. Tacton Trusted Configuration simplifies sales for manufacturers of complex products. Tacton's founders pioneered computer-based product configuration which today powers Tacton CPQ and CAD Design Automation. It is co-headquartered in Chicago and Stockholm, with regional offices in Karlsruhe, Warsaw and Tokyo.