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Business goal: Anticipate and adapt to customer demand

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The manufacturing market has gone global. Most manufacturers rely on customers from around the world, not just in one country. These global customers have high expectations. And manufacturers must respond quickly to their needs to remain competitive. Although the value of providing a more customer-centric experience is evident, it's challenging to implement this concept in the organization.

That's why a growing number of manufacturers have adopted the latest generation of customer relationship management (CRM) technology. These systems help companies respond quickly to changing market situations.

Microsoft partners have created innovative software solutions that can be customized to meet the specific needs of manufacturing customers. These easy-to-adopt solutions provide enhanced customer experiences, and, ultimately, increased revenue for the manufacturing company.

Manufacturers must address shifting customer needs

With the manufacturing market expanding to a global scale, every manufacturer faces a wide range of competitors. Customers have come to expect high-quality products at reasonable costs. If one manufacturer doesn't meet a customer's needs, the customer can look to a broad range of competing manufacturers to find a solution.

When seeking a manufacturer, customers typically ask:

- **Does the manufacturer provide a high degree of professional customer service?** Customers are not only shopping for high-quality products, they are also in the market for accommodating and professional customer service. An effective customer care framework can make or break a sales opportunity.
- **Does the manufacturer offer product and service customization?** Manufacturers who want to maintain an edge over the competition must provide customers with product and service customization. By tailoring products and services to meet a customer's specific needs, the customer is more likely to return to the same manufacturer for other solutions going forward. Customer loyalty can lead to additional product and support acquisitions from the company or even new customers by word-of-mouth recommendations.

Maintaining a competitive edge can be challenging in a global market. Manufacturers can make intelligent business decisions by considering the following:

- **Make the most of existing sales data.** Celestine Vettical, Microsoft director of manufacturing industry solutions, says that predictive analysis using existing sales data is an intelligent method for planning future marketing campaigns. "Manufacturers need good insight into their customers," says Vettical.
- **Integrate sales and marketing.** The integration of sales and marketing, according to Vettical, "can help tie demand generation directly to sales coordination." Requests for certain products or functionality can drive development and eventually sales, so that sales representatives can easily target the right customers with the right value proposition for products with the requested features.
- **Provide an effective customer care framework.** Vettical also points out that an effective customer care framework can help address customers' expectations for excellence in customer service. "Customers want to talk to one person," says Vettical. "They want one touch point. Customer service representatives should have the right information available while interacting with a customer, or they should be able to collaborate with experts on the fly. Customer service representatives also have the ability to cross-sell other tools that the customer might benefit from."

Ultimately, by addressing customer needs and planning effective marketing campaigns based on previous experience, manufacturers can step ahead of their competition.

CRM solutions help create a mutually beneficial customer relationship

Manufacturers recognize customer needs, and have in mind how they want to address those needs. The challenge lies in finding a software solution that is flexible and easy to manage, and empowers people to do the most for their customers.

Solutions built on Microsoft technology can help by centralizing the information and processes people use when interacting with customers. For example:

- **Customer databases.** Customer information can be stored in a database that can be accessed by people at all levels of the organization, helping everyone make intelligent decisions, from customer care to sales to production.
- **Collaboration with experts.** Collaboration software that is familiar and easy to use enables teams to communicate with experts and each other to deliver customer solutions quickly. "Most companies have call centers," says Vettical. "We provide better experiences by empowering people who are dealing with customers."
- **Reporting.** Technology makes reporting about the success of customer interactions easy by tracking call data and providing instantaneous graphs and charts for analysis.
- **Data mobility.** Sales representatives can copy customer data onto handheld devices, which they can use while selling products when away from the office.

The right solution: Building on the Microsoft platform

With a standard platform of Microsoft applications such as the Microsoft Windows operating system and Microsoft SQL Server, Microsoft partners have developed cost-effective and high-return CRM software solutions. When implemented, these solutions provide tools that help manufacturing companies meet and exceed customer demands. According to Celestine Vettical, Microsoft worldwide director of ERP/SCM/CRM solutions, CRM software solutions are the key to maintaining a competitive edge.