Unlocking Hidden Potential

See how data is ushering in a smarter,
more productive future for manufacturing.

Overview

The world of manufacturing has changed, fueled by evolving customer demand that requires more diverse and sophisticated offerings. A higher bar for ease of purchase has powered more robust, personalized digital sales flows. Increased expectations for service experiences have given way to new innovations – from Internet of Things (IoT)-enabled equipment to maintenance subscriptions.

The trajectory is clear. The future will be built on an end-to-end customer lifecycle that yields deeper customer connections and more resilient, predictable revenues. And the foundation for that future is data.

Manufacturers need to unify new and legacy systems to support heightened operational efficiencies. They need to analyze every stage of the customer journey to guide smarter sales and service decisions. They need to manage and harness the record-setting volumes of information running through their business.

The role of technology in our lives has never been more critical. Here's why it matters now more than ever.

A New Landscape

As manufacturers transition to a more end-to-end-minded model, data matters more than ever. The notion of "product-as-a-service" businesses has evolved the landscape. Where a commercial HVAC manufacturer once focused simply on making a sale, increased competition and new technologies have paved the way to game-changing innovation. The sale is now just one stop in a far more comprehensive customer journey that could extend for decades – a journey defined by innumerable data points. Tracking the entire useful life of an HVAC system creates opportunities to build an enduring relationship with the customer until they're ready to make their next purchase.

Manufacturers know who bought the system, when they bought it, and when they might need a new one. But of course, that's just the beginning. Every customer interaction contributes to a sophisticated customer profile driving powerful insights. And with IoT technology, manufacturers gather valuable real-time information from their products (like when parts need replacing), guiding incremental service outreach and setting the stage for sales of subscription-based maintenance contracts.

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>
> – Deloitte Survey on AI Adoption in Manufacturing

In short, all roads lead to mastering your data. But for manufacturers, that's often easier said than done. Why? Because the data equation for manufacturers is a complex one. According to Deloitte, "Manufacturing is estimated to generate about 1,812 petabytes (PB) of data every year."

Yes, 1,812 petabytes. That's around nine hundred trillion pages of standard printed text – every year. From the factory floor to logistics networks, the volume of data running through manufacturing makes it, according to Forbes, "the most data-prolific industry there is." And as the modern manufacturing ecosystem expands, so does that data volume.

That said, data volume is only half the problem. Because all that data is stored in scores of systems purchased at different times over several decades. These legacy systems may or may not integrate well – or at all – with each other. And the challenges are multiplied as manufacturers inherit the data and systems of new acquisitions. Many manufacturers are relying on more than 30 enterprise resource planning systems (ERPs).

Suffice it to say, while the challenges can feel overwhelming, the imperative is clear. The future of manufacturing requires a purpose-built solution to adapt and thrive in this data-driven environment.

How Can Technology Help?

Ultimately, the goal is managing product data, asset data, customer data, and all other data effectively, then putting it to work to promote sales growth and customer satisfaction through an end-to-end customer experience. And all of that needs to be done reliably and securely.

Managing the Data

Mulesoft's Connectivity Benchmark report found that 81% of IT leaders said data silos are hindering their digital transformation efforts. That means gaining a competitive edge starts with a single platform that integrates with your other systems to provide a reliable "control room" for your data.

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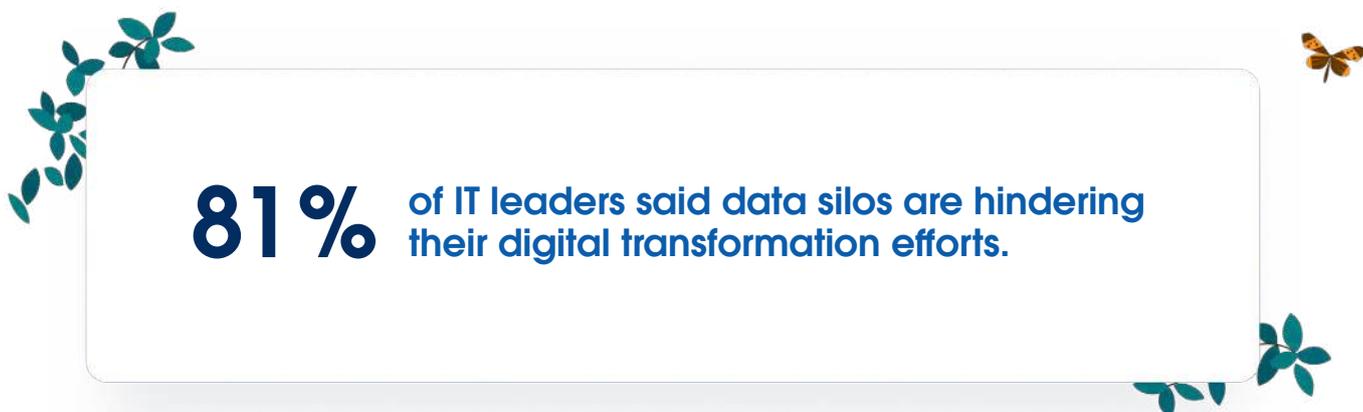
Customer relationship management systems (CRMs) like Salesforce Manufacturing Cloud have deep integration capabilities to ensure that nothing is lost or inaccessible to users, despite the myriad ERPs and other data strongholds in play.

Such platforms can even automate the gathering of partner data, in a uniform way. From dealers to distributors to engineering firms, your data set will be the same for all sales channels, powering parity and utility.

Everything your team needs is placed in a single engagement layer, customized for each user's profile, empowering them to get what they need when they need it. This translates to better opportunity visibility and a better-informed go-to-market pattern – more at-bats, with a higher batting average. In the end, it's about getting more products sold, more products sourced, and more customers served.

Putting the Data to Work

Now, let's take a closer look under the hood to flesh out some of the details of how a full-function data platform can impact sales and service.

Sales

Sales teams have a number of administrative tasks to handle on top of selling, but cumbersome processes born of poor data integration often make it difficult to handle those tasks quickly and effectively. The right platform can unify all your customer, product and asset data – including critical revenue management data from legacy systems. And that data can simplify workflows, accelerate daily tasks and support more efficient, more effective account engagement.

For example, when it comes to sales agreements, a simple dashboard can give the team quick and easy visibility into accounts that are lagging behind targets – prompting reps to reach out to customers to get them back on track.

The right platform can also surface insights and recommendations for cross- and upselling opportunities, and provide forecasts and real-time updates on pricing recommendations and approvals. For example, if material costs are trending higher than what's covered in an agreement, the system can alert an account rep, who can then reach out to the customer to discuss modified pricing.

Service

Service teams struggle when customer information isn't easily accessible and next actions aren't easily determined. The right platform can give teams a 360-degree view of every customer – along with the tools to fuel deeper relationships and build long-term loyalty. For example, every rep can see every interaction a customer has had over time and use rule-based alerts to easily highlight key milestones.

Knowing everything they need to know about every customer helps agents shift from reactive case management to proactive customer engagement – anticipating and addressing issues before they become tickets. Not to mention, unlocking key data through integration with ERPs and other systems can reduce agent workloads – fueling self-service options that enable customers to get what they need without a wait.

By anchoring all of your data in a single, highly functional org-wide resource, your business will be able to orchestrate all of the activities driving the modern end-to-end vision for manufacturing. In other words, it's the key to enriching every aspect of sales and service, from rebate and incentive program management to field service dispatch.
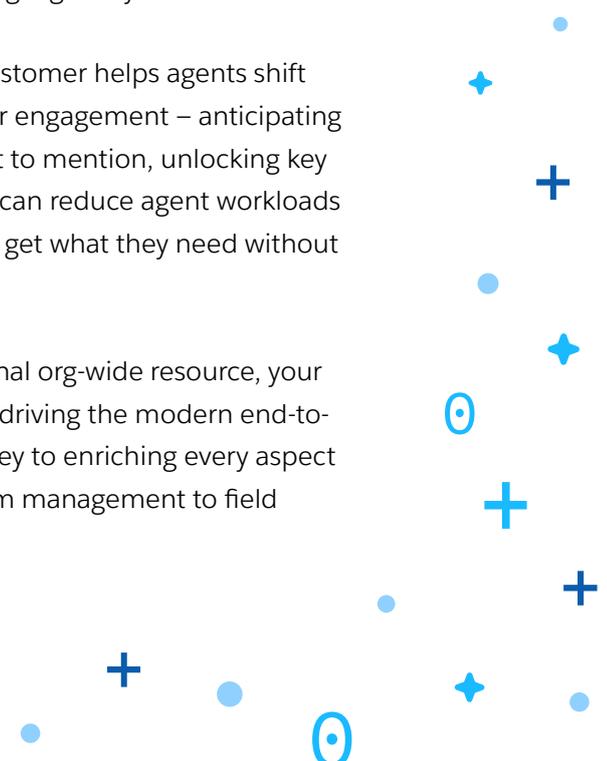
The AI Factor

AI has been a powerful presence in the manufacturing industry for roughly two decades. But that presence has been primarily in the form of point solutions – algorithms for predictive maintenance, etc. Now the potential to move AI's impact beyond those silos and into an integrated presence across all of your data is immeasurable.

This is especially true of generative AI. This technology can give new employees instant access to deeper product knowledge, enabling them to operate at a level of efficiency that once required decades of experience. Plus, it can help customers understand technical product attributes and applications leading to better buying decisions and uncovering previously unrealized cross-sell opportunities.

But more broadly speaking, next-generation AI tools like Salesforce's Einstein 1 Platform can enhance productivity in countless ways with low-code or even no-code AI implementations:

Service Benefits
- Help customers find answers without having to speak to an agent
- Predict relevant case details in any language using machine learning
- Use route rules to deliver cases from any channel to the right queue
- Surface personalized recommendations based on org-wide system integrations

Sales Benefits
- Attract more live conversations with prospects
- Identify and focus on leads most likely to convert
- Close sales faster with automated insights, transcripts and next steps
- Address pipeline gaps with actionable intelligence in the flow of work

From automating "next best actions" to building reports based on unstructured data to enhancing quality control, AI is driving a ground-breaking transformation across the industry.

Secure and Reliable

As established, manufacturers are dealing with more data than ever. And with more data comes a greater need for top-tier reliability and security. Moreover, as AI becomes more of a factor, it's critical to evaluate safeguards for this new frontier. Your trust needs to be earned and validated with substantive measures. Some trust-earning features to look for in a platform include:

Dynamic grounding
steers large language models (LLMs) – "grounding" them in factual, relevant data and preventing AI hallucinations, or incorrect responses

Data masking
replaces sensitive data with anonymized data to protect personal information and comply with privacy requirements

Toxicity detection
flags toxic content such as hate speech and negative stereotypes

Zero retention
ensures no customer data is stored outside of the platform

AI auditing
makes sure systems are working as expected, without bias, with high-quality data, in-line with regulatory and organizational frameworks

Secure data retrieval
lets users safely bring in the data they need to build contextual prompts – with every interaction secured by governance policies and permissions

Want to get to know the world of AI better?
Learn the language with our Generative AI Glossary.

In Closing

In the modern manufacturing landscape, your data is arguably your greatest asset – and maximizing your teams' access to and utilization of that data may well be your greatest priority.

Want to talk about how Salesforce Manufacturing Cloud can help you tackle this new era of data? Discover how CRM + AI + Data + Trust can change your business.

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