

How will data help us secure and win new business?

As world economies start to regain strength and competition increases, we asked ourselves: how data can boost our productivity and competitiveness; how can we manage risks when sharing our data with customers and suppliers; and how we can use data to increase our sales and add value to our customers.

Here's what we learned from each other:

How can we use data to boost our productivity and competitiveness?

- Design and Engineering seems to be far ahead of Manufacturing Operations in using data to drive performance (e.g. CAD data and input to Virtual Reality). We need the right mindset and to look for simple solutions (e.g. sensors, data capture and a dashboard).
- Encouraging teams to work together to share and use data is crucial. Gradually building understanding of the impact of good data works best, which means cascading good practice across the business from the top.
- People must be actively involved in improving data analysis
 - starting with employees and bringing customers on the journey.
- Getting the right data (and getting the data right) needs special attention. There's often a wealth of old data available, but not always accessible. Legacy data is a challenge but there can be a compelling case to digitalise it. Ongoing data capture must be standardised and focused on user requirements and business value, before investing in new solutions. Value stream mapping is a good place to start.
- Cloud solutions can be effective, but we need an over-arching strategy to align data processing with business objectives. Separate systems, which can co-exist for good reasons, must be properly integrated for slick workflow, resilience and cyber security.



How can we manage risks when sharing our data with customers and suppliers?

- Larger customers and suppliers can be better resourced, but are often slower than SMEs in embracing data sharing.
- Opening up our data through a customer portal can make the sales process more efficient but run the new risk of exposing inaccurate or misleading data. We have to invest in the right data architecture and software integration.
- We are concerned about data security, but should not be over-cautious. We need to balance protecting our interests with driving business value. We can't leverage the full power of cloud computing if we restrict data to "secure" on-premises storage. Edge computing is an effective solution, but expensive – until a data hack has even more expensive consequences.
- Customers may not recognise the value of a data-driven solution, for example using IIOT sensors and remote monitoring to optimise machine control. We need to develop joint service requirements with customers, founded on a common understanding of user experiences and goals. This requires a culture of collaboration at all levels.

How can we use data to increase our sales and add value to our customers?

- Good data has a key role in marketing and selling, from online surveys through to managing sales pipelines using CRM systems. Some SME manufacturers are still relatively immature in using these established systems and processes.
- Equipment installed with IIOT sensors and feeding performance data back to customers, can generate insights alerting and predicting the need for action as well as automating control in real time. The range of applications is growing all the time, and in all markets.
- Customers may operate with "silos" of data making it difficult for us to discern and optimise (for example) maintenance and operational performance at the same time. Collaboration is key, from an early stage of specification of performance requirements.
- Fair use of data and openness between organisations can lead to efficiencies throughout the supply chain and shared benefits. For this to work, senior managers must be seen to sponsor the initiative.



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