



Optimize

Leverage Partnerships to Exceed Customer Expectations and Win

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Take stock of your business partners.

Use this five-step checklist to ensure you are on the right path.

Select partners that are innovative and can help you anticipate needs, obstacles or opportunities.

To stay competitive, manufacturers should use partners that add long-term strategic value aligned to business plans and technical needs for now and for the future.

Change. In business, it's happening faster than ever, across industries and across borders.

The rapid advancement and adoption of new technologies is exponentially speeding up the rate of change in the manufacturing industry, posing real business opportunities and challenges. Now more than ever, businesses are feeling immense pressure to deliver services and goods faster and better than the competition. Agility and increased speed to market have become critical differentiators for businesses who are watching the lifecycle of ideas and products shrink rapidly, juxtaposed by the growing demands of customers.

The real question manufacturers ought to ask is: How is your company transforming its business in a way that will enable you to deliver and stay competitive?

The first order of business must be to take stock of your business partners. Partnerships play a key role in you satisfying your customers' needs and your ability to stay ahead of the competition, while also helping you overcome any barriers within your own business. Consider the following when evaluating your partnerships:

- Do your partners add value to your company's strategic vision?
- Do they understand your long-term business objectives?
- Are you effectively evaluating your business partners against the backdrop of the demands emerging from this changing business landscape?

- Are you leveraging your partners effectively to help navigate through this change?

To make the most of your partnerships, use this five-step checklist to ensure you are on the right path.

1. Audit your business partners to ensure you are positioned for success in implementing your long-term business plan.

Share your business plan with them to not only align on expectations, but most importantly, to solicit input on how to achieve your company's vision. You need to make sure you are supported by partners who can help you achieve the desired future-state of your business.

2. Understand the importance of a best-in-class supply chain capability backed by industry-leading customer service.

Fundamentally, it is essential to have the right supply chain strategy, accurate products, and efficient delivery in order to truly have license to operate in today's competitive environment. However, it requires a partner with the right expertise to help navigate the vast array of products and solutions that exist, and one with a network that can deliver what you need, when you need it.

3. Realize the myriad solutions and expertise that are required to help optimize a supply chain.

Manufacturers need a partner who can bring services and solutions to the table to help streamline your business operations. Your partner should be an extension of your procurement and supply chain operations, and provide value at the highest and lowest levels.

4. Know the importance of having superior technical support to help you optimize manufacturing applications.

When it comes to supply chain management, technical expertise is paramount to solving complex business issues; however, not all providers offer the right skillset to meet your needs. Be discerning and thorough when evaluating your partners' abilities in this capacity.

5. Find a partner who is thinking about the future state along with you.

Select partners that are innovative and can help you anticipate needs, obstacles or opportunities. For example, there is a growing need to find and cultivate the right talent who can continue to shape and evolve the industry. It is this next-generation of the workforce who will play the greatest role in driving success in manufacturing. Having a business partner who understands how to elevate critical skillsets on the plant floor is key.

At the end of the day, your businesses' success depends on your ability to exceed your customers' expectations while improving your bottom line. The most direct way to achieve that is through increased speed to market. An ideal partner is one who can offer the complete end-to-end portfolio of supply chain capabilities, solutions, services and technical expertise can support you in this goal. This is the big "difference maker" for customers, and it ought to be a requirement for your business.

This article first appeared on [advancedmanufacturing.org](https://www.advancedmanufacturing.org).

How are you working successfully with your partners today? What do you and your partners need to do to improve your relationships?