



HOW-TO GUIDE

Five ways to succeed with proactive mass customization

“Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black,” said Henry Ford, remarking about the future of Ford Model T cars, in 1909. Times certainly have changed since then, with the growing interest in customized products and services. In fact, the majority of consumers are willing to [pay more for customization](#). With an increasingly crowded and competitive market, mass customization is now an imperative for success.

Here are five critical steps companies can take to meet increased demand for customized products.

1. Plan for flexibility

There’s more to a configured, customized product than meets the eye. In this new era of personalization, companies quickly find that the old-school best practices of operational efficiency, a smoothly running supply chain, and inventory optimization are just prerequisites for a successful configured product strategy. After all, configurability isn’t a one-and-done proposition—you need to sustain a high level of flexibility over the long haul. Everyone from shop floor personnel, to procurement, to product design needs to be ready to participate in a faster, more detailed collaborative process.

You’ll also need to measure results more frequently to see which configuration options resonate with customers, so that you can continually fine-tune your approach.

2. Modularize and automate

In theory, enterprises that make configured products follow a relatively simple formula: expand product variety by combining components. But there's nothing simple about making that formula a reality. First, you need to identify frequently repeated component combinations that you can standardize. After you've identified the most promising opportunities, you can streamline the supporting processes.

By building a product line that combines even a small number of interchangeable components, you can create thousands of product permutations—which provides customers a wide array of choices. This kind of “building block” approach allows you to expand product variety without adding excessive complexity. In the apparel sector, **nearly 50% of manufacturers** report that they're even “modularizing” production by creating smaller production runs to react faster to market demands. But there's a catch: with thousands of product permutations, your workflow can grow to be unmanageably complex. Fortunately, the right business process management platform can help you consolidate all the details into a form that managers can easily understand and control.

3. Capture and reuse project specifications

Most customized products aren't entirely new creations fresh from the drawing board. They're usually a tweak or extension of a previous configuration. You can avoid reinventing the wheel by using past success as a guide to future innovation. Sometimes, even your biggest flops can blaze the trail to your market's next big thing—if you can identify what went wrong and fix it. Thomas Edison failed thousands of times to invent the light bulb, but when he finally got it right, he changed the world. If you deploy a configure-price-quote (CPQ) process that helps you easily organize and reuse past plans and budgets, you can gain creative breadth, avoid costly surprises, and possibly lay the groundwork for success.

4. Integrate configuration with operations

Great planning won't get you anywhere without equally great execution. To make mass customization a workable reality, you have to bridge the gap between configuration and operations. When you integrate a configure-price-quote (CPQ) platform with your operational systems, good things happen. You can quote faster. You make manufacturing more efficient. Your pricing becomes more accurate. You may even find new ways to fine-tune processes that you never even considered—such as making large items before small ones, or light colors before dark ones. You can also tear down the silos that separate sales, engineering, and manufacturing, and preventing them from sharing redundant information.

5. Get interactive with customers and dealers

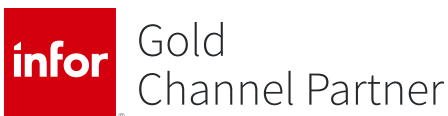
As competition increases and knockoffs abound, it gets harder to build differentiation on product alone. That's why making the customer experience rich, engaging, and highly personal content is so important. **Eighty-seven percent of consumers** say that they're interested in a personalized and consistent experience across channels. By creating an interactive customization and ordering experience, you can stand out by giving customers what they're clamoring for.

Also, when you give customers the tools to configure products themselves, they feel a sense of ownership with what they design. And a customer who invests time using your online configurator is more likely to develop a strong—and ongoing—connection with your brand.

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641 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10011

INF-2633661-en-US-0222-1



151 South Warner Road
Wayne, PA 19087
www.copleycg.com
sales@copleycg.com
855.884.5305