WHY ERP IS KEY TO THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Delivering on customer satisfaction and driving customer loyalty is crucial in both business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) companies. Successful manufacturers and wholesale distributors are discovering that Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems help drive positive customer interactions, create a competitive advantage and build more loyalty over time.

This is even more important in the face of competitors like Amazon, who have revolutionized the expectations of anyone buying anything at any time. Once only a B2C player, the company's Amazon Business marketplace has features that bring Amazon's selection, convenience and value

to businesses, and Amazon Business is now a major competitor for manufacturers and wholesale distributors. This "consumerization" of business buying means your B2B customers now demand an Amazon-like experience from your company as well. However, many manufacturers and distributors aren't investing enough in improving their customer experience in the face of the Amazon Business threat.

"Too many businesses are stuck in a routine, doing what they've been doing for years," said Mike Marks, managing partner of Indian River Consulting Group and a member of the National Association of Wholesale-Distributors' Institute for Distribution Excellence Fellows.

This results in a series of critical disconnects that impede customer experience and thwart cost reduction, such as:

- **DECENTRALIZED DATA.** When critical information on customers, financials, e-commerce, orders, inventory and more is spread across multiple siloed solutions, assessing overall business performance and analyzing aggregated data is slow and difficult.

- **FRACTURED VIEW OF CUSTOMERS.** Similarly, fragmented customer data — from contact information to order history to support tickets — hinders your ability to understand customer needs and deliver consistently exceptional service.

- **LACK OF END-TO-END SUPPLY CHAIN INSIGHTS.** Without a clear view into your supply chain, you can't fix bottlenecks, fill and route orders efficiently or enable customers to have the self-service experience they expect.

- **LIMITED OR NO E-COMMERCE OPTIONS.** E-commerce is no longer a nice-to-have for B2B. When other companies make it easier to pay for products, your customers may be lured to do business elsewhere.

- **INSUFFICIENT CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT.** Competing for business is more difficult without a data-powered customer acquisition and retention strategy.

"To really deal with [the] Amazon effect, you need to think about business strategies and new business models, then buy some [technology] tools and integrate them to scale," Marks said.

This all comes back to customer experience, and ERP is the backbone of that experience.

USE ERP TO INFLUENCE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Digitized processes and unified data improve overall business performance and boost customer satisfaction. Having all your systems on one platform creates efficiencies and opportunities to provide more value for your customers and engender loyalty.

MINI CASE STUDY:
C.O. BIGELOW

C.O. Bigelow is a 180-year-old New York City pharmacy, online and in-store retailer and distributor of fine beauty and care brands. The fast-moving, complex personal care space — especially in men's care products — challenged the company's legacy position. The family-owned enterprise deployed new technology to compete in the modern marketplace, overhauling its back-office platform with NetSuite ERP. NetSuite's unified system enables C.O. Bigelow to more efficiently manage B2C e-commerce, in-store sales and B2B distribution for retail partners.

> " Since adopting NetSuite ERP, C.O. Bigelow's wholesale channel has grown more than 30% annually. "

Since inventory management is integrated into the platform, management now has a single and accurate view of stock across multiple channels, supporting order management and optimizing fulfillment from two warehouse locations. Since adopting NetSuite ERP, C.O. Bigelow's wholesale channel has grown more than 30% annually, cash flow has increased and the business has better control over pricing. Read the full case study. ■

To win at customer experience, migrate routine customer service activities to an ERP solution that uses automation and puts data in one place to speed response times and enable self-service. This frees up field sales staff to focus on the highest-value personal service and market-making activities that require a human touch.

Savvy distributors and manufacturers see the importance of making processes seamless. Here's how the smartest firms do it using ERP:

DEPLOY ADVANCED CRM and sales with real-time, 360-degree views of customers and prospects that are built into your ERP, not standing apart from it. When data is aggregated, and functions can "talk" to each other on the same platform, internal communication and customer service vastly improve. You can smoothly move customers from lead to quote and from order to cash within a seamless environment — tracking the customer's journey, managing communications and providing insights on preferences and behaviors that help you better meet their needs.

ENABLE MULTI-CHANNEL COMMERCE with core business systems that support traditional and digital transactions for both B2B and B2C customers. You can create the frictionless path to purchase that every customer values,

track credit limits and offer desirable options like special pricing, discounts and rapid reorder.

ACHIEVE OPTIMAL INVENTORY LEVELS despite market conditions, challenges or changing business models. Track incoming replenishment orders, reduce out-of-stock situations and enable customers to have their own windows into real-time inventory levels online.

STREAMLINE ORDER MANAGEMENT with efficient, transparent and automated order fulfillment that meets buyers' expectations and creates loyal customers. Using data from the system, you can uncover the most expedient and cost-efficient path to filling orders via distribution centers, logistics partners, stores, etc.

IMPROVE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING with data-driven insights that don't require manually intensive spreadsheet reporting. The most effective ERP solutions produce higher efficiency, better visibility, reduced risk and stronger compliance. You can quickly and easily manage IT costs, streamline procurement, track receivables, use automated tasks to improve employee productivity and create accounting efficiency. For example, NetSuite customers accelerate financial close by 20% to 50% using NetSuite ERP.

HOW NETSUITE ERP POWERS CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Accurate and timely information is critical to the customer experience, and NetSuite ERP provides it. "As customer relationships are enhanced with the help of ERP, providing faster and more accurate responses to inquiries and issues, companies see increased CSAT scores, and a reduction in time to resolution metrics," said Matt Wisner of Oracle NetSuite. "Our manufacturing and distribution customers see 118% revenue growth, 84% employee efficiency improvement and 81% order processing improvement," he said. In the most recent Gartner Magic Quadrant report, NetSuite customer references scored the very highest in client satisfaction overall, and the majority of NetSuite's references were satisfied with the product. Learn more about using NetSuite's complete ERP to run your business.

"Overall, communication is essential. The value of accurate and timely information is critical to the customer experience. The ability to provide real time product availability, instant order confirmations, shipping notices, as well as timely invoice and payment information are all critical to keeping a customer informed," noted Matt Wisner, Industry Principal, Manufacturing Center of Excellence for Oracle NetSuite.

EXPLORE ERP ADOPTIONS OR UPGRADES — AND LEVERAGE THE CLOUD

Technological advancement is not going to slow down. Today's world is becoming increasingly digital, while data from the National Association of Manufacturers shows sales are expected to grow by 3.4% over the next year. The industry is ripe for growth, and manufacturers and distributors must be prepared to keep up.

ERP is essential for growth and scalability — especially in the cloud. This makes it important to consider how you can leverage cloud technology.

Moving your ERP system to the cloud supports anytime, anywhere access to data in a secure online environment that scales to your specific needs. Cloud-based solutions update automatically and require little IT staff to support, which eliminates upgrade disruptions and annoying version-lock situations. For instance, NetSuite ERP users report IT cost reductions of 50% or more after implementing NetSuite ERP.

"It is more critical than ever for organizations to have a system that allows them to scale and provides a platform that supports future goals," Wisner said.

Companies that don't recognize this will fall behind. That is why now it is more important than ever to explore options to upgrade your ERP system and take advantage of these opportunities. ∎

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ABOUT NETSUITE

NetSuite, a wholly owned subsidiary of Oracle, empowers tens of thousands of fast-growing companies with software to transform and accelerate their businesses. Using NetSuite, these companies run their businesses on a single, unified platform reducing IT costs and gaining comprehensive, real-time visibility across their organizations. NetSuite gives companies customer-facing sales force automation and e-commerce, as well as marketing and customer service capabilities that link seamlessly with back-office inventory management, fulfillment and financials. In delivering NetSuite for thousands of customers, NetSuite leverages experience and lessons learned with a best practice professional services implementation methodology and customization services.

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