



Becoming Easier to Do Business With

*Ten Capabilities Customers Want from a
Manufacturer of Customizable Products*



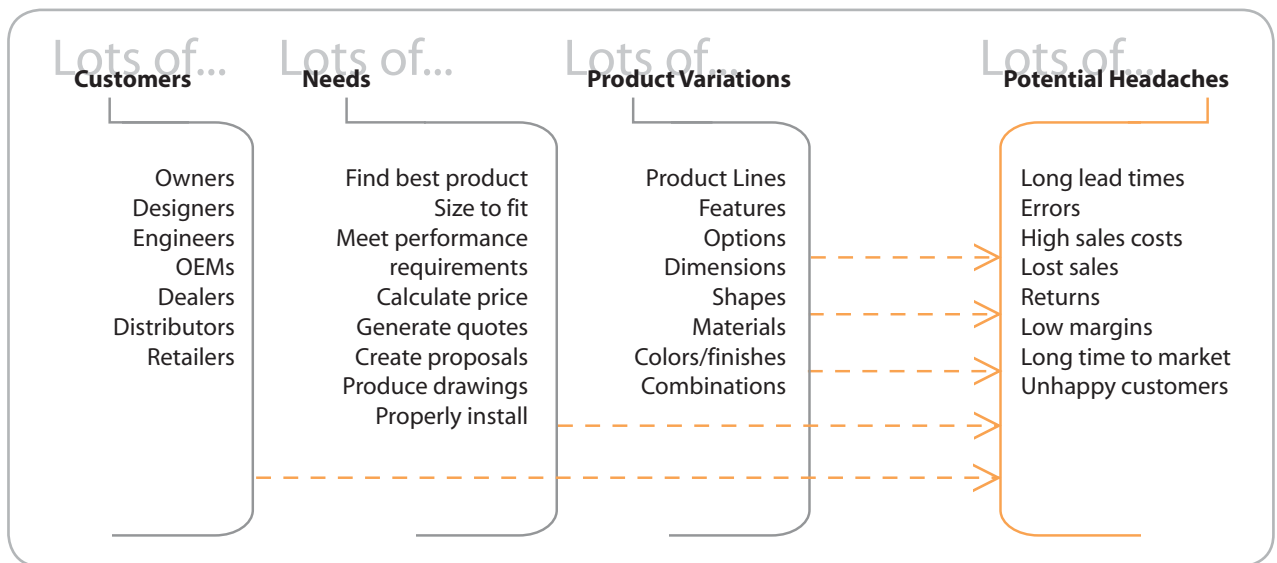
Ten Capabilities Customers Want...

From a Manufacturer of Customizable Products

If you sell equipment, machinery, industrial components, specialized vehicles, building products, or any other type of product with a wide range of available features, options, and dimensions, you have a lot of variety in your product line.

Furthermore, if you're like most manufacturers, you probably sell through some combination of sales reps, distributors, dealers, and retailers. And of course there are the owners, designers, engineers, and OEMs that often influence whether your products are even considered. That adds up to a lot of different 'customers' you need to satisfy in order to win the business your products deserve.

There's no question product quality, brand awareness, reputation, and price competitiveness are key factors in why end-customers and channel partners choose your products. But 'the way you do business' is becoming an increasingly important differentiating factor as well.



What does 'easy to do business with' really mean?

In this environment of high product variety and multi-level sales channels, being 'easy to do business with' is about understanding the needs of each participant and making it as simple as possible for each of them to do what they need to do – i.e. select, configure, price, bid, or order the products that best fit their wants and needs. And everyone's expectations of 'easy' are growing every day – the Internet is seeing to that.

By working with leading manufacturers of products as diverse as construction equipment, machine tools, pumps and valves, watercraft, heating elements, conveyor belts, gaskets, windows, doors, cabinets, HVAC systems, auditorium seating, commercial window treatments, and more, TDCI is helping to shape what 'easy to do business with' means in many of today's markets.

This white paper is based on what we have learned from working with these diverse companies. It provides a brief summary of the most important capabilities TDCI has found customers (e.g. dealers, distributors, contactors, designers, and owners) consider important to making a particular manufacturer 'easy to do business with'. What they want is:

"I just want current, complete information – when and where I need it."

1 Easy access to accurate, up-to-date product information.

Providing accurate, complete, and up-to-date information at the right place and the right time is key to making life easier for your customers. It can be both frustrating and time-consuming for them to wade through complex printed materials only to find after making multiple phone calls that product options and prices have changed. And what if they need information about your products at 5:00 am, 8:00 pm, or midnight, when your customer service staff isn't available?

Depending on the nature of your products and the type of customer, they may want easy access to your product information via the Internet, locally in their office, at a job site, or wherever their customer is. In any case, they will be truly happy only if they feel they can rely on your information to do their job well. That means you need a way to consistently keep it accurate and up-to-date.

"Help me out a little... it's not always obvious which one of your products is best for my needs."

2 A fast, easy way to find and select the right product for their needs.

'Fast' and 'easy' may have very different meanings for different types of customers. Someone interested in your products for the first time, or for an application they see infrequently, may need to be guided to the right product with questions about where and how it will be used. A dealer, on the other hand, may know exactly what they want because they order it every week, and they just want to place the order as fast as possible.

Since you can be pretty sure you'll have customers with varying levels of knowledge, it's important that you provide multiple ways to find and select your products – from a well-organized catalogue for the typical customer, to intuitive guidance and information tools for the novice, to easily re-orderable 'my favorites' for the frequent buyer.

“Clearly describe your options and help me make the right choices.”

3 A fast, easy way to specify product features, options and dimensions.

Again, you are likely to have customers with widely varying levels of knowledge about your products. The most important thing you can provide for all of them when they are ordering configured products is a process that is complete and intuitive – and that ensures they will order a valid product. Building on that foundation, you can then provide tools that make it easier for each customer depending on their needs and situation.

As with product selection, you want to provide multiple ways of specifying features, options, and dimensions – from a highly guided approach with lots of supporting information for novices, to a rapid ‘nothing but the facts’ approach for experts. Other capabilities that can make life easier for your customers are ‘order level features’ (e.g. specify a particular color or material for all items on an order), ‘same as except’ (i.e. copy one line or a saved configuration and change only what’s different), etc. The point is to understand how various types of customers work and make ordering clear and easy for them all.

“Seeing is believing!”

4 Visual confirmation of the product they’ve selected and defined.

It’s very true that ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’ in terms of helping customers select a product or feature, or helping them verify that they’ve specified the product they wanted. And the more accurate the image, the better.

For standard products, a static image associated with each item in your catalogue may be all it takes. For products with customer-specified features, options, or dimensions, you may want to do more – like automatically select an appropriate image based on the option selection. For many products, an engineering drawing that varies depending on what they’ve selected is extremely helpful. For products where the fit is critical, you may need to generate a 3D model with exact dimensions and features, enabling the customer to rotate and manipulate the product to ensure it meets their needs. For products with various colors, materials, finishes, or lettering, you may want to generate photo-realistic images that show exactly how the product will look given the selected options.

“Give me the right price the first time so I know what to quote my customer.”

5 A fast, accurate price quote on ‘standard’ product configurations.

Being able to quickly produce an accurate price quote can often make the difference between winning and losing a sale. For products with a relatively standard set of dimensions, features, and options, your customers just want to get the correct price quickly.

It’s getting the ‘correct price’ that’s sometimes the challenge. Your customers want to quote competitive prices to their customers while making as much profit as possible. In addition to list price, your customers want to know exactly what their costs will be – with all appropriate discounts or mark-ups clearly applied – in order to effectively manage their margins. And they may want to quote orders that include value-added services or other products in

addition to yours. You will be considered much easier to do business with if you provide them with all the price and cost information – and flexibility – they need in order to deliver winning quotes to their customers.

“Give me an easy way to order specials.”



A fast, collaborative way to define, quote, and order products that go beyond your standard offerings – i.e. ‘specials’ or engineer-to-order items.

There are always needs that go beyond standard offerings – a slightly different dimension or shape, a special motor, extra reinforcement, etc. The ability to handle those needs efficiently and painlessly can set you apart from the competition. In many cases, your ability to smoothly handle the ‘one in a hundred’ special order can make you the more attractive supplier for the ninety-nine other orders for standard products as well.

When it comes to ‘non-standard’ products, the key is to have a ‘standard’ process – a process that’s fast and reliable, requiring as little time on the part of the customer as possible. The best way to achieve this is to have a process that makes it easy for the customer to identify and describe the ‘custom’ feature they need right in context with all of the standard specifications. Then you want a fast (i.e. electronic) flow of that information to the right people. For instance, for products with “semi-custom” options or “unusual combinations”, you might want to set them up as options, but when selected, simply put the order on hold and notify a customer service representative to contact the customer to verify they understand any possible ramifications of what they’ve specified. For options that truly require custom engineering or design, you want to route the order for engineering review and pre-approval. In any case, the person handling the order should have immediate access to all the information about the product configuration and order. In this way, everyone who needs to be involved is able to quickly and efficiently collaborate to meet the customer’s needs without having to go back and ask the same questions repeatedly, and without letting the request ‘fall through the cracks’.

“Make it easy for me to develop proposal packages that are complete and describe exactly what the customer’s getting.”



A fast way to create winning bid or proposal documents with associated configuration-specific information.

In many cases, your dealers or distributors need to produce detailed proposals, bids, or submittals in order to get the business. If they can do that more easily with your products than with the competition’s that may be the deciding factor in whose products they propose.

In addition to basic item, quantity, and price information, proposal documents often need to include configuration-specific product descriptions, engineering specifications, images, and drawings, and other product- or customer-specific information. Your ability to automatically produce these items for the dealer and deliver them in a ready-to-use electronic form can dramatically reduce the turn-around time for them. And of course, the faster they can produce winning proposals, the more winning proposals they can produce – and that means more business for you.

"I need it fast, and I need it right."

8 A short order-to-delivery lead time – with no errors.

Fast delivery of the right product is one of the most fundamental requirements of being easy to do business with. If your lead times are too long, you're asking your customer to know what they need too far in advance. If you deliver the wrong product (i.e. not what they ordered or meant to order, regardless of who's 'fault' it is), you may cause project delays that cost thousands of dollars.

In addition to making product selection and configuration as intuitive and fool-proof as possible, you can only ensure fast delivery of the right product by streamlining your own internal order-to-delivery processes. For 'to-order' products, that means rapidly translating the customer's order into the information your manufacturing facility needs, and getting that to them immediately. The right bills of material, drawings, and manufacturing instructions must be made available to your production facility to ensure they produce the product as ordered. If these must be manually created, the time and potential for mistakes will quickly add up. Many manufacturers have recognized the need to automate this process and the leaders are doing it now.

"With all your product changes over time, I sometimes need help picking the right part."

9 A fast, easy way to find and order replacement parts or after-market accessories

If your products ever need maintenance, repair, or replacement, your customers probably judge your overall product and service quality in part from how easy it is to get service parts and accessories. Don't forget this important aspect of how your customers do business with you.

All of the issues above about guiding customers to the right part(s) based on their problem or maintenance, configuring the parts as needed, handling specials, etc. are equally important when it comes to replacement parts. There is no doubt that dealers and end-consumers alike appreciate a supplier that makes after-the-sale service easy and painless. This appreciation is usually expressed with repeat business.

"I could sell more of your product if it was easy for my customers to spec them in from the start."

10 Access to CAD and other technical content that enables trade professionals to 'spec-in' your products.

The decision regarding what manufacturer's products are used in a project or new building is often determined very early on by the architect, engineer, designer, or contractor. Making it easy for those 'customers' to include your products in the overall design can have a huge impact on your sales over time.

Providing trade professionals with an easy way to generate accurate configuration-specific CAD models or design blocks makes it easy for the 'specifier' to incorporate your products directly into their designs or layouts. For instance, AutoCAD design blocks can then enable an automated take-off process and create a schedule that already has much of the information needed to quote and order your products. This approach streamlines the entire process from design to order. All things being equal, why wouldn't everyone involved want to use your products?!

How can you become easier to do business with?

Achieving the outward-facing capabilities outlined above requires internal processes that are efficient, consistent, and largely automated. It requires close control of data and effective coordination of sales, engineering, and manufacturing activities.

TDCI's BuyDesign® Product Configurator and Guided Selling solutions have been developed to help you do just that. BuyDesign combines powerful configuration technology with a comprehensive family of web- and PC-based solutions that complement your existing sales, engineering, and manufacturing systems. BuyDesign delivers solutions to empower your dealer network and/or direct sales force with powerful quoting, proposal generation, and ordering capabilities, as well as solutions that enable you to offer intuitive self-service buying for end-customers, distributors, and service providers. It includes solutions focused on meeting the needs of other customer types as well, including engineers, architects, and trade professionals. Together, these solutions enable you to provide the kind of customer-facing capabilities that help you become 'easier to do business with' for your entire range of customers.

Learn more about BuyDesign and what it can do for your company, by visiting www.tdci.com. Or contact TDCI at 614-781-2325 or info@tdci.com to learn more about how we're helping other leading manufacturers become 'easier to do business with' today.



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