5 KEY TRENDS IN MANUFACTURING & DISTRIBUTION FOR 2018

In the world of B2B buying and selling, 2018 is the year digital technology becomes not just necessary, but second nature to manufacturers and distributors. Here are the 5 big trends that will shape sales and ordering this year.

1 A LASER-SHARP FOCUS ON PROFITABILITY.

With the rapid advancement of B2B selling technologies in 2018 comes a sharper focus on profitability. Manufacturers and distributors have automated their sales and ordering processes to reduce their cost to serve customers, and they're going one step further with more thoughtful buyer segmentation exercises. This involves deciding which customers are best served by a self-serve online B2B eCommerce portal, and which customers are profitable to serve with more traditional in-person sales conversations.

2 OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW.

Manufacturers and distributors are continuing to find that the legacy barcode scanners, "Generation 1" early Internet B2B eCommerce solutions, and clunky custom-built portals they invested in years ago are no longer relevant in today's digital selling world. 2018 promises to see more B2B suppliers update these outdated solutions to modern, consumerized technologies that line up with the expectations B2B buyers have from their consumer online shopping experiences. For most companies, this switch will be made possible by updating to SaaS (Software-as-a-Service) sales and ordering solutions.

3 A DIFFERENT KIND OF TRADE SHOW.

As B2B eCommerce gives buyers a self-serve option to place orders 24/7, product launches, demos, and education take precedence on the trade show floor. For some industries, this will mean a continued de-emphasis on order writing at shows. At trade shows in 2018, it will be paramount to arm reps and booth staff with technology that gives them access to rich product information, whether they're educating the buyer, writing an order, or sending a quote for review after the show.

4 AGGREGATED MULTI-CHANNEL SELLING.

The B2B supplier of 2018 leads with technology. Their sales reps are enabled, and their customers order online. More and more businesses will boost efficiency by aggregating their sales channels, both offline and online, into one single platform. This approach allows suppliers to update product, pricing, and inventory information in one central location and present a clean and uniform customer experience to the buyer, whether they're ordering online or from a rep.

5 NATIVE MOBILE APPS, NOT MOBILE-OPTIMIZED WEB.

2018 will see businesses doubling down on improving the mobile experience for their buyers— specifically in the form of native mobile apps. For many, this means updating outdated handheld barcode scanners or no longer requiring buyers to log into their B2B eCommerce portal on a mobile browser. Native mobile applications are installed from an app store and can often function offline. Mobile technology development has moved rapidly towards a native mobile dominant environment, and in 2018, the B2B world will finally move along with it.