



You have to run as fast as you can just to stay where you are. If you want to get anywhere, you'll have to run much faster.

Lewis Carroll

quote fancy

## Digitize As Fast As You Can



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The word is out – or I should say, its initials are – AI. If you are involved in distribution, you will hear AI mentioned in most webcasts, podcasts, and at conferences. It is being incorporated into your business space and it's time to get on board. Digitize as fast as you can.

Progressive distributors, their suppliers, and their customers are already using functional ERP, eCommerce, and product content software solutions. A distributor's current goal for customer digitalized order entry should be at least 30% of sales. That means about a third of your customers are placing orders without direct human interaction with your staff. **Data collected via digitalized order entry enables AI applications to analyze customer order frequency, cross- and up-sell, and apply effective pricing trends.**

### The benefits of AI

Improving order entry is just one of the many benefits of AI. Here are some of the other ways AI can sharpen distributor

operations.

- 1. Improving order processing methods** – With AI order processing can be completed using text, emails, faxes, PDFs, or even verbal commands. One software developer sells a system that uses OpenAI ChatGPT, Microsoft CoPilot, or Google Gemini to assist a salesperson using a cell phone. It allows a seller to take a customer request, prepare a quote, and even place the order. Innovative digital developers will come to your company and train your sales, operations, and supply chain employees on their product. Many can have new software operational in the matter of days.

- 2. Training new employees** – As experienced employees retire, their wisdom and knowledge base go with them. **AI can provide deep learning by analyzing the skill set of experienced employees and then create training materials from that analysis for new hires.** Chatbots and virtual assistants can provide on the job training for each



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new work challenge encountered.

**3. Accelerating Continuous Improvement (CI)** – Generative AI enables companies to accelerate their CI planning. It is an agent for constantly improving specific repetitive tasks. **AI can analyze performance metrics, identify areas of improvement, and make necessary adjustments to enhance business operations.**

**4. Revolutionizing Sales** – The digital transformation has revolutionized the sales process. A salesperson can now present to multiple decision-makers. In preparation for those calls, Generative AI can provide insight into customer needs and each participant’s interests. **This informed machine learning process changes the salesperson’s posture toward customer need from reactive to proactive.** Salespeople need to become adept at using the powerful sales tools AI offers.

**5. Creating strategic business plans** – AI Smart Analytics uses Application Performance Management (APM) software to create a single integrated digital thread across a company’s

whole asset life cycle. This enables your entire executive team – from CEO to finance, operations, sales and marketing managers – to have insight and input into your strategic business planning.

**6. Maximizing profits** – The adoption of AI is accelerating rapidly. It is important that you understand how the application of these tools impact your bottom line. **A data-driven approach to sales and operations allows distributors to quickly and confidently analyze their asset development for a maximum return on investment.**

The overarching goal of a successful distribution business is to provide products and services with ease and efficiency. Becoming more productive with AI tools allows you to grow and prosper. As the cost of entry to these tools continues to decline, the opportunities for improving your return on the investment are enormous. My advice – digitize as fast as you can.

## 5 KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. AI can improve distributor operations. You need to digitize as fast as you can.
2. With AI, data collected via digitalized order entry can improve many of your business systems.
3. AI can analyze the skill set of experienced employees and then create training materials for the new labor force.
4. AI changes the salespersons’ posture to customer need from reactive to proactive.
5. A data-driven AI approach allows distributors to analyze their asset development for a maximum return on investment.