

# Business Continuity in Tough Times:

## How Sales Order Automation Can Keep You Resilient and Agile

“This is a wake-up call for organizations that have placed too much focus on daily operational needs at the expense of investing in digital business and long-term resilience. Businesses that can shift technology capacity and investments to digital platforms will mitigate the impact of the outbreak and keep their companies running smoothly now, and over the long term.”

- Sandy Shen, Senior Director Analyst at Gartner, March 2020



Suddenly, the stakes are higher than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has sent shockwaves through supply chains and every other element of the global economy. Businesses are swamped with customer inquiries at a time when their staff are deprived of their regular workstations and processes are under massive strain.

Manufacturers and distributors are faced with two urgent and pressing questions: How do I create business resiliency, in order to ride out this turbulent moment? And now do I create business agility, in order to thrive, both today and tomorrow? Tough times bring clarity. In reality, these have been the key questions all along.

To succeed, manufacturers and distributors need to assess their business for risk factors, and find ways to optimize processes and reduce costs. They need to eliminate non value-add activities from core business functions, and over-deliver on customer value. That has always been the game. But now, the business pressures are unprecedented.

Digital automation is the key to how manufacturers and distributors can safeguard key business objectives in these disrupted times. This is the moment when dated, traditional processes need to be exchanged for modern processes. Everything that can be automated will be automated.

**Sales order management is a key business process. It is also an area where many enterprises have yet to swap traditional approaches for modern approaches. Now is the moment to make the shift.**

Automating the sales order management process is a guaranteed way to maximize revenue opportunities and create cost savings. The time to value is short, a matter of weeks, and carries only light IT effort. The macro result? Business resilience and business agility. You set yourself up to be ready to respond now – and during the next crisis. Plus: a company that can adapt and be resilient is a company that can better allocate resources and headcount at the first signs of disruption.

**Sales order automation radically optimizes how distributors and manufacturers handle the sales order process. It empowers enterprises to do three key things:**

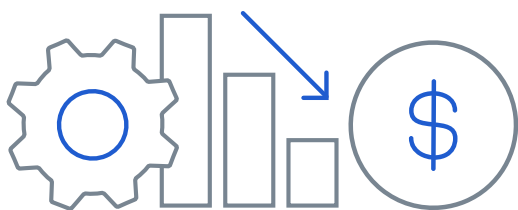
**1**  
Reduce  
Operational Costs

**2**  
Reduce Order  
Cycle Times

**3**  
Focus on  
Customer Service

**By embracing sales order automation, distributors and manufacturers improve their ability to thrive, even during periods of massive disruption to society and the economy.**

# 1. Reduce Operational Costs



The COVID-19 instability is squeezing balance sheets. Now more than ever, distributors and manufacturers need to shave operational costs wherever they can. Ideally, they want to do this without having to lose loyal staff .

Sales order processing is an area where many enterprises spend far more than they need to. Why? Because they are reliant on traditional, manual approaches.

On average, CSRs (customer service representatives) spend a third of their day keying in purchase orders. And due to the deep customer-facing knowledge that CSRs have accrued over their years of service, they command salaries that support their role. **According to the Hackett Group, the financial burden of manual sales order processing can be as high as \$26 per order.**

With the current disruption, CSRs are improvising their order handling from home. They are scrambling to handle orders without the tools and processes of their familiar office environment. This means that, however hard they work, their traditional, manual processes are even more inefficient than usual.

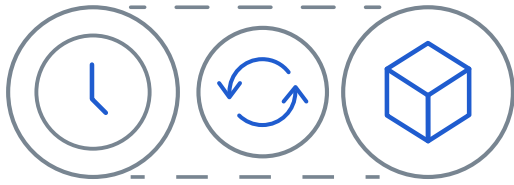
Now is the moment for high impact, high ROI initiatives. In these uncertain times, not a single dollar should be squandered on anything that is not a strategic growth driver.

**Sales order automation** is one of the most powerful ways for distributors and manufacturers to do more with less. With touchless sales order automation, emailed purchase orders are automatically delivered into the ERP system and become sales orders.

**With sales order automation, companies win back thousands of hours of human capital. Management can tactically redeploy the hours saved into revenue-generating processes. Crucial in a crisis – and plain smart during normal times.**



## 2. Reduce Order Cycle Times



Supply chain volume has stalled, and delivery times have extended. This is damaging the customer experience. Delivery dates are being placed further out than normal. Often they are shifting around unpredictably.

The higher-level causes of supply chain disruptions are beyond companies' power to influence. However, where they are in control of optimizing their supply chain – where the delivery is from their own warehouses to their end customers – then they can still pull one very powerful lever: They can **reduce order cycle times**. And right now, if a deliverer can show stability and predictability, that is a massive differentiator.

A major blocker here, though? The traditional method of manual order processing.

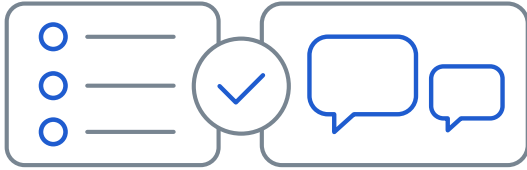
The majority of orders in wholesale distribution and manufacturing are handled manually. This is such a laborious and time-consuming process that it seriously impedes efficient fulfillment. Purchase order backlogs are common. Purchase orders sent towards the end of the working day are frequently not processed until the following day, or require overtime in order to cut out the delay.

And in the current environment, the pressures are worse than ever. Sales staff are forced to work at home, and handle their responsibilities over email. They may not be able to print the orders like they normally would. Even if they can get into the office, it is only in shifts, and without the usual levels of support staff.

**Automating the manual entry of purchase orders delivers them into the ERP system for packing and shipping within minutes. In the current climate, consumers are expecting delivery delays. A company who can exceed customer expectations, especially at this time, can seriously set themselves apart.**



### 3. Focus on Customer Service



In distribution and manufacturing, customer service is key. Strong relationships and personal connections are the backbone of business success. Despite the current disruptions, now is not the time to let standards slip. Now is the time to work even harder to satisfy loyal customers.

The disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic have triggered a flood of customer inquiries. Companies' phones are ringing off the hook. Responding to these inquiries requires being able to perform careful, one-on-one customer service.

How can companies respond to this demand, and elevate the customer experience during these trying times? By liberating the CSRs from the slow, traditional approach of manual order processing.

A good CSR is a product specialist with deep knowledge of the products sold at their company. Often, their years of service mean they possess grandfathered knowledge about the applications, specifications and uses of company products.

Skilled CSRs are sourcing experts for alternative products, when a first choice has been discontinued or is unavailable. Most importantly, **CSRs are salespeople**. They are a company's direct connection to a customer that is seeking information about an existing or potential transaction.

In these disrupted times, companies need to empower CSRs to do what they were hired to do: satisfy concerned customers. The calls are flooding in; CSRs need to free as many hours as they can to respond.

Here is what CSRs don't need to be doing: spending a third of their day manually keying in purchase orders. Instead, they need to be using their imitable product knowledge and personal connections to improve customer experience and boost customer loyalty. A digital tool cannot perform this subtle, learned, human function. But it can convert purchase orders into sales orders.

**Enterprises that embrace sales order automation will unshackle their CSRs to drive growth, even when the chips seem like they're down.**



“The organization of the future depends on automation to create massive efficiencies and new capabilities — and has the potential to unleash human capital to pursue more creative, higher-value goals.”

*Forrester, December 2019*

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The disruptions of the current moment have brought into acute focus a need that was there all along: the need to trade the traditional for the modern.

CSRs are currently drowning in customer inquiries, at a time when they are struggling to enact their usual processes. But for many distributors and manufacturers, the processes themselves have huge inefficiencies baked-in. The current moment is a stress test. And manual sales order processing is failing the test.

Sales order automation has a minimal time to value. It is up and running in less than 30 days, with no burden to IT. Rapidly, it begins to reduce operational costs, reduce order cycle times, and empower enterprises to focus on customer service by unlocking human capital.

With sales order automation, distributors and manufacturers can eradicate non value-add activities from core business functions, and start to over-deliver on customer value. By trading dated, traditional processes for modern processes, they gain resilience and agility – now, and on the other side of the crisis.

## Testimonials

“Our CSRs are able to concentrate on things that add value for our customers. Conexiom’s order processing time is light years faster than what we are able to do manually.”

**Mike Jirikowic,**  
*Continuous Improvement Leader,*  
*Werner Electric Supply*

Our CSR team multi-tasks less and focuses more. As a result, team spirit is high, our error rate is zero, and our customers are happier.”

**Alex Kaczor,**  
*Customer Service Manager, Swagelok*

“Staff can now take calls on non-structured orders that are more varied and custom, as well as spend more time with customers.”

**Pepi Stahlmann,**  
*Director of Customer Service,*  
*Häfele America Co.*

“Our CSR team used to spend 80% of their time on order entry, and 20% of their time on customers. Now, it’s 80% on customers and 20% on order entry. And no need to backfill former employees.”

**Genpak**



## About Conexiom

Conexiom® eliminates the manual entry associated with the processing of business documents through its purpose-built, AI enabled solutions. Conexiom simultaneously increases customer satisfaction while reducing costs, improving productivity and accelerating order-to-cash cycle times. Conexiom gets you touchless, faster—and your customers and trading partners don’t have to change a thing about how they do business with you.

For more information, visit [www.conexiom.com](http://www.conexiom.com)