

Modern Mass Customization – Rule 5: Brace for Change

by Jordan Reynolds

Following from the post [Free to Choose: Mass Customization for Modern Manufacturers](#), here is the fifth rule to live by for modern mass customizers.

A successful shift to mass customization requires a holistic strategy with a far-reaching impact across the enterprise, a sound vision for organizational adjustments to the company, and skillful change leadership.

Manufacturers should expect more than technology changes when transitioning to a mass-customization model. The organizational impacts of this transition are far reaching, and typically require role changes in marketing, sales, engineering, manufacturing, and operations teams. These changes are by-products of the order-of-operations shift necessary to develop mass customized products.

Consider the typical phased approach to mass produced goods:

- Executive leadership delivers work orders for products they want to release to the market place
- Engineering designs the products, and releases designs to manufacturing
- Manufacturing builds the products, and stocks them into inventory
- Sales and marketing work to sell the finished goods out of inventory to customers in the marketplace

While mass production techniques end with the customer, mass customization begins with them. This means you should expect your order of operations to be reversed. You may also consider decoupling into two processes that operate concurrently in a closed loop fashion: the fulfillment of orders for the customer, and the production of new product platforms and modules.

Order Fulfillment Process

- Customers interface directly with a product configurator to design a product variant that meets their specific needs
- Orders are broken down into a Bill of Modules
- Orders are submitted with an integrated e-commerce platform; order details and customer preferences are collected on the side and managed for CRM and analytics
- Order processing teams review the orders for validity and pass on to agile manufacturing teams for fulfillment
- Manufacturing teams source the modules from inventory, assemble according to the order requirements, and package the finished product variant
- The finished product variant is shipped to the customer

Product Development Process

- Engineering designs new modular product platforms, and new modular components for their existing platforms
- Configuration rules are defined to govern how components can interface with each other in a saleable product configuration
- Marketing teams filter these rules to ensure compatibility with marketing and sales strategies
- Release to Manufacturing - Components are manufactured and submitted into inventory at volumes proportional to demand trends for that component
- Release to Sales - Final rules and component options are updated in product configurator, making them available to the enterprise, and to be used in product variants by customers

The Role of Leadership

Changes like these do not happen overnight. A successful mass customization program requires sponsorship and a high degree of involvement from executive leadership. Transparent Organizational Change Management (OCM) will enable your leadership and employees to understand changing roles throughout the company. Engineering will shift their focus. Sales will collaborate with the customer. The company will have to break out of departmental silos and share their customer and product findings. Company leadership and management should be able to understand and articulate what this strategy means for them: how they are engaging with, instead of reacting to, the customer.

The Impact on Partners and Customers

These organizational changes are not limited to your company. Your supply chain partners will need to be able to react with the same speed and dexterity that you exhibit. This could extend from raw material through distribution. Changes to your extended enterprise may call for a reassessment of your partners and their obligations.

Your customers will also be impacted, as you are now asking them to interact with you in a different way. Just as you will need to invest in internal training to successfully make this transition, you will need to invest in training your customers. Ensure that they know how to operate the new tools you have presented to them and that they know where to go if they have questions.

Mass customization is achievable now. Customers want to customize their purchases. Manufacturers want to make products the customers will buy. Both customers and the manufacturers want to do this at a price point and on a time line that is mutually beneficial. Through production efficiency and customer configuration, this demand can be met. By embracing the mass customization production strategy emerging across different industries, your company can gain new market share while still investing in the company through research and development.

More Rules for Modern Mass Customizers

[Modern Mass Customization – Rule 1: Modularize your People, Processes and Products](#)

[Modern Mass Customization – Rule 2: Follow the Rules](#)

[Modern Mass Customization – Rule 3: Honor the Order, Abandon the BOM](#)

[Modern Mass Customization – Rule 4: Look Your Customer in the Eyes](#)

[Modern Mass Customization – Rule 5: Brace for Change](#)

Originally published on May 29th, 2014

[What's your view? Add your question or comment](#)

About the Author



Jordan Reynolds

jordan.reynolds@kalypso.com

Jordan is a senior manager at Kalypso.