VISUALIZE THIS!

3D Sales Tools Enhance the Customer Experience

Customer Experience, Touchpoint Optimization, Mass Customization... buzzwords for the latest customer-centric strategies. We are constantly reminded how the continued commoditization of products is making it increasingly difficult to compete, based on product or price alone. Obvious concepts for most executives. Less obvious is identifying concrete steps to increase your product sales.

Several companies from diverse industries have put theory into practice by deploying intelligent catalogs. Unlike traditional print or web-based catalogs, which have many shortcomings, intelligent catalogs take advantage of the 3D graphics capability in today’s PCs to make the sales process more simple, understandable, and enjoyable for customers.

By utilizing interactive 3D software to convey product choices, options, and configurations, these new catalogs greatly enhance a customer's understanding and comfort in preparing orders for expensive, complex products. By presenting products in the context of your customer's situation (their closet, their vehicle, their office), users are provided with a personalized, unique design experience, allowing them to virtually "try on" designs. Finally, by embedding product intelligence, improper configurations and combinations are eliminated, slashing the number of order errors. In addition, intelligent catalogs allow sales groups to focus more on key customers, minimizing reliance on corporate-based sales support groups.

A global leader in the office furniture industry has created a long-lasting competitive advantage by making its sales process simple, quick, and affordable. Prior to developing its intelligent 3D catalog, long, complex sales cycles and inaccurate orders were the industry norm. The solution has put the full capabilities of the corporation in the hands of its sales people and customers. The investment has paid huge dividends: shorter sales cycles, guaranteed order accuracy, industry-leading customer satisfaction, and most importantly – significant revenue and profit.

Herman Miller: Looking beyond the limits

Although their customer service capabilities were already superior to industry averages, Herman Miller leaders believed there was room to improve. Operating within the framework of their existing sales and manufacturing workflow, dealers and salespeople were levied with extensive legwork to help customers peruse product catalogues, visit showrooms, create detailed AutoCAD® models, construct accurate price quotes from multiple supply chains, and generate component lists and specifications for the manufacturing process. Herman Miller leaders were determined to make substantial improvements to these laborious service attributes. As the strategy for improvement developed, Herman Miller executives began asking some key questions:

What if we pushed beyond what our customers were asking for?

What if we moved beyond the limits of what our customers already knew and were used to?

What if we found new things to do and new ways of doing them that created unmatched levels of service?

The core strategy became: To find new and better ways to meet and then exceed customer expectations.
Z-Axis — a dramatic new sales tool

After researching solutions, Herman Miller partnered with Seattle-based Computer Human Interaction, LLC (CHI-LLC™) to create Z-Axis — a business tool that makes it easier for customers to discover and obtain the office systems they want, in an appropriate time frame and budget.

Developed using an icon-based graphical user interface, Z-Axis allows customers to preview their new offices in 3D color, with multi-angle motion zooming capabilities, and lets them immediately see how changes in fabrics and finishes will affect both aesthetics and pricing. Unlike other configuration tools, Z-Axis allows for 3D previewing within the context of the customer’s existing office environment. This capacity is further enhanced by the ability to design and preview an office layout around imported customer blueprints.

With Z-Axis, the customer and his Herman Miller representative work together to lay out an office space — including architectural features such as walls, doors, windows, and columns — and dynamically create and place modular workstations within that space. Further, the program creates installation plans with elevations, 100% accurate parts lists, to-the-penny-pricing, and dynamic 3D views that help ensure an accurate, on time installation.

ROI: Results on Investment

With Z-Axis in use for over 10 years and still enjoying popularity, Herman Miller is preparing to deploy the 36th release of the software. Evidence that the technology continues to enhance customer service and improve sales can be found throughout the organization.

Herman Miller account executive Dan DeLeon explained how Z-Axis affects his ability to compete head-to-head with other office furniture salespeople. During one customer visit, he asked the customer to give him an hour to develop a proposal for a new space. DeLeon interviewed the employees who would work in the space, measured the floor, and picked the colors. Within an hour, he returned to the customer with a floor plan and showed the proposed furniture to the customer in 3D. The customer approved it on the spot. As DeLeon recalled, "By the time the competition presented a floor plan, the customer responded, 'The furniture is already installed!' Z-Axis sets you apart from the competition—it makes you different. Nobody else in the industry can respond so quickly."

When commenting on recent research into the effectiveness of Z-Axis as a sales tool, Kris Manos, Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing at Herman Miller adds, "When you review the research, it becomes clear that Z-Axis differentiates us from competitors and contributes significantly to sales ... We will continue to invest in Z-Axis and we see that investment continuing to pay us dividends for years to come ... We're convinced we have only begun to leverage its capabilities and realize its full potential."

Herman Miller’s initiatives in partnership with CHI-LLC’s customer-focused technologies have produced extraordinary results. The average time from order entry to shipping improved to six days, compared to an industry average of four to eight weeks. On-time shipping reliability improved to 99.7% and customer service satisfaction ratings are
consistently among the highest in the industry. Most importantly though, Herman Miller enjoys improved sales through technologically enhanced customer service. They are recognized worldwide for their forward-thinking reputation, being ranked in the top 50 “most innovative corporate users of information technology” by InformationWeek magazine, and consistently revered by Fortune magazine as the “Most Admired” furniture company.

**Purpose-Built Sales Tools**

Multiple factors are converging and driving the need for firms to evaluate the tools they currently use in selling their products and services.

**Expanding Competition**

The number of products, available options, and complex configuration rules are causing a data and catalog explosion. Print catalogs are point-in-time, static documents that can be expensive to create and ineffective at demonstrating all product options and configurations. Many firms have resorted to subdividing their products into multiple catalogs – increasing expenses and confusing many customers as to the breadth of offerings. Others are simply putting their catalogs onto CD-ROMs, making the process of “catalog-surfing” even more overwhelming. To help salespersons demonstrate options to their customers, some firms have developed sales support capabilities based on popular 3D and CAD systems. These tools generally are not designed to be used in front of the customer and require expensive PC workstations to run the software (and CAD-savvy operators as well) – slowing down the sales process.

**Increasing Customer Expectations**

Although many firms’ web-based business models failed in 2001 and 2002, there is no doubt that the Web has changed customers’ expectations. Customers are demanding that all “touchpoints” (web, call centers, salespersons, and retail) provide easy-to-understand and accurate information. With the rapid globalization of manufacturing, and expansion of channels for most goods, it is becoming increasingly difficult for firms to differentiate themselves based solely on product excellence or price performance. Firms that have remained successful have embraced the entire customer experience as a way to compete for and defend market share.

**Decreasing Form Factors**

Although shipments of desktop PCs have plateaued, the growth in sales of laptop PCs has continued to surge. Along with laptop PCs, most US households now have a game console (Playstation, X-Box, GameCube) and soon the majority of consumers will have grown up playing video games. The necessary hardware (processors and memory) to run graphical software and PC games is almost ubiquitous in today’s laptop PCs. The 3D graphical experience is here and adoption will accelerate with Microsoft’s next version of Windows, codenamed “Longhorn.”

CHI-LLC, with over 14 years of experience creating 3D sales tools, is poised to help forward-thinking firms address the opportunity created by the above trends. Many firms will make the mistake of bolting sales modules onto existing CAD-based software or appending non-graphical product configurators with 3D graphics. Both of these approaches have been shown to result in tools that are overly complex to use and uninteresting to customers – ultimately leading to under-utilized solutions, and worse, frustrated customers and salespersons. In other words, the challenge is in creating sales tools that offer simplicity without limiting choices.

CHI-LLC is unique in its long history of creating purpose-built sales tools designed from the ground up to be engaging, simple to use, and accurate. We have created custom solutions for clients representing a wide-range of industries; from office solutions, to closet storage systems, to commercial vehicle equipment – contact CHI-LLC to discuss how an intelligent catalog can help your company revolutionize the customer experience. Visit [www.CHI-LLC.com](http://www.CHI-LLC.com) to learn more or contact us at [sales@CHI-LLC.com](mailto:sales@CHI-LLC.com).