Advent of the Augmented Commercial Team in Industrials

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INTRODUCTION

The commercial function of industrial companies is under more pressure than ever. Decades of acquisitions have left behind complex systems, scattered data, and inconsistent processes. Experienced talent is retiring, while new entrants to the sector remain scarce—leaving a shrinking pool of commercial and technical expertise. Product portfolios have exploded in size, and customer expectations are evolving faster than sales teams can respond. The result is a commercial engine slowed by manual work, fragmented insights, and delayed decision-making.

Yet change is within reach. Artificial intelligence offers industrials a way to break through these long-standing barriers—not by replacing human judgment, but by amplifying it. AI can automate the repetitive tasks that consume sales and product teams' time, reveal insights buried deep in legacy systems, and enable faster, more confident decisions across the organization. For sales teams, it can analyze buying patterns, predict churn, and recommend the next best product or offer. For product managers, it can track competitor pricing, detect sources of margin leakage, and align product features more closely with customer needs. For channel marketers, it can monitor campaign performance in real time and optimize investments for maximum ROI.

When deployed thoughtfully, these capabilities can transform the commercial function from reactive to predictive—from a function that manages transactions to one that continuously drives growth. This article explores how industrial organizations can harness AI to tackle today's commercial challenges, unlock productivity, and lay the foundation for the next generation of performance.

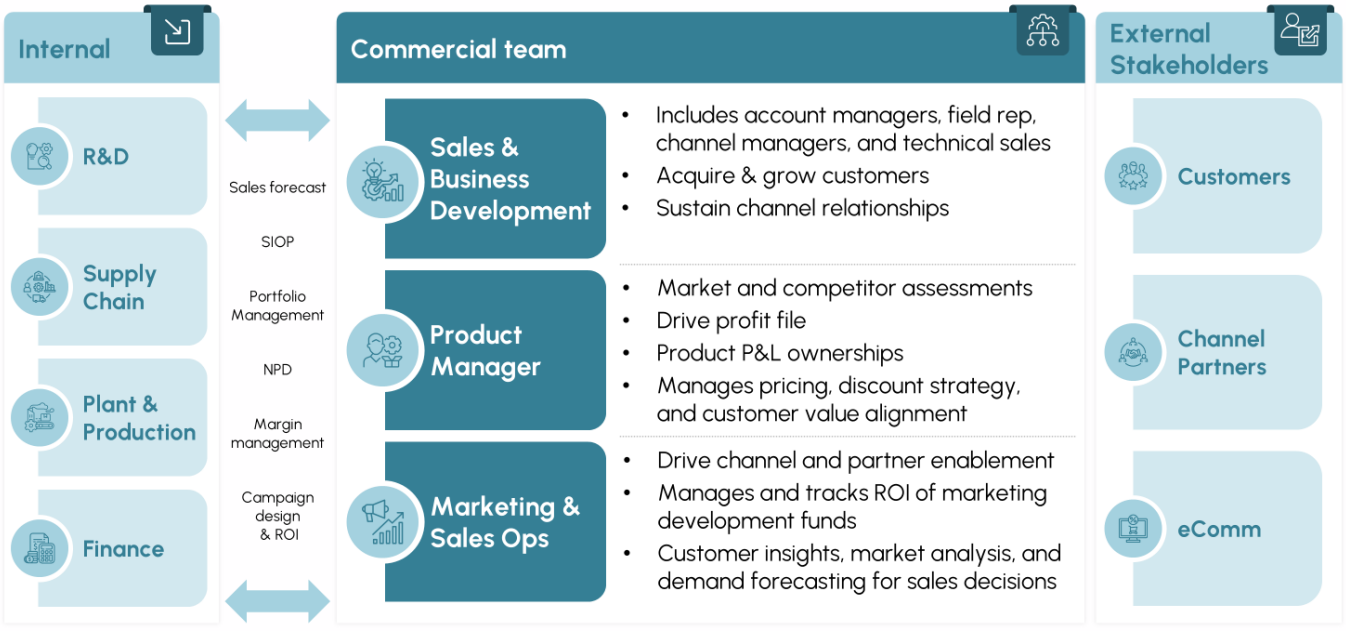
Inside the Industrial Commercial Organization

The commercial function sits at the intersection of internal operations and external markets. It connects R&D, production, finance, and supply chain with customers, partners, and distributors—translating what the company makes into what the market needs. In an ideal setup, this should make the commercial organization the growth engine of the business. Yet, legacy systems, siloed data, and manual processes have eroded that potential.

A typical industrial commercial organization revolves around three core roles: Sales, Product Management, and Channel Marketing & Sales Operations (Exhibit 1). Each plays a distinct part in driving growth and value creation.

Exhibit 1

Commercial teams operate at the critical intersection of external (clients, partners) and internal stakeholders



Sales: The sales organization—comprising account managers, field sales representatives, and channel leads—owns the customer relationship. It drives acquisition, retention, and expansion across both direct and distributor-led models. These teams depend heavily on accurate and timely information about pricing, production schedules, and inventory levels to deliver on customer commitments and grow share of wallet.

Product Management: Product managers serve as the connective tissue between engineering, operations, and the market. They translate technical capabilities into marketable offerings, assess competitive dynamics, and set pricing and margin strategies. Their role demands continuous visibility into costs, demand signals, and customer feedback to ensure that products stay relevant, profitable, and differentiated.

Channel Marketing & Sales Operations: These teams orchestrate the link between strategy and execution. They manage partner programs, rebates, and marketing development funds (MDFs); run digital campaigns; drive forecasting; and track performance across channels. They are the critical glue in sales forecasting providing analytical support, turning data on sales, customers, and market that drive production & inventory decisions.

While each of these roles is designed to fuel growth, their effectiveness depends on how seamlessly people, processes, and systems connect. In most industrial organizations, this alignment has become increasingly difficult. The next section examines the structural and role-specific challenges that have slowed commercial performance.

The Commercial Challenge in Industrials

The industrial sector has reached a tipping point. While other industries have used software and AI to leap ahead, most industrials remain weighed down by legacy infrastructure and fragmented data. Commercial functions across industrial companies are grappling with a consistent set of structural challenges:

Disjointed Systems: Over the past four decades, industrial companies have accounted for nearly 14% of all global M&A transactions. Each deal brought its own ERP and MES systems—creating a patchwork of data environments that rarely integrate smoothly. The result: inconsistent reporting, poor data quality, and a heavy reliance on manual work just to generate basic insights. 35% of firms report incomplete data, 31% manage outdated data, and 30% have data that's simply inaccurate[1]. Sales and product teams often wait for analysts to pull information they should be able to access instantly.

Shrinking and Shifting Talent Base: Talent shortages are compounding the problem. Nearly every manufacturer—97%—worries about brain drain, and 60% list talent attraction and retention as their top challenge[2]. The talent crunch is no longer limited to the shop floor—it's reshaping commercial teams too. Experienced leaders are retiring in large numbers, while younger professionals show limited interest in industrial careers. This dual pressure is eroding the knowledge base that sales, product, and marketing teams depend on to price accurately, position value, and maintain customer relationships. As know-how dissipates and onboarding new talent becomes harder, critical commercial decisions increasingly rely on a few individuals or incomplete data.

[1] "A Deep Dive into Data, Collaboration and Automation Advanced Manufacturing Report." n.d. Accessed November 5, 2025. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6500be7b90b0f770653f355f/t/6776b4c4384338357ee0086a/1735832814406/Hexagon+-+2024+Advanced+Manufacturing+Report.pdf.

[2] National Association of Manufacturers. 2019. "The Aging of the Manufacturing Workforce: Challenges and Best Practices." https://www.themanufacturinginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/MI-Sloan-Aging-in-the-MFG-Workforce-Report.pdf.

Complex Portfolios: Industrial companies manage sprawling product portfolios, often with thousands of SKUs—many of which are obsolete, redundant, or poorly documented. Experts estimate that roughly 60% of parts in a typical manufacturer's portfolio could be rationalized[3]. Disconnected data systems make cleanup slow and resource-intensive, leaving product managers to navigate clutter instead of focusing on innovation and pricing strategy.

Slow Sales Cycles: Industrial sales are long, complex, and contract-heavy, typically taking three to six months. In recent years, over half of B2B salespeople say these timelines have lengthened further. Meanwhile, rising material and labor costs are squeezing margins and forcing difficult pricing decisions—especially as lower-cost foreign competitors flood the market. This trend exacerbates existing issues, making lead generation and aftermarket sales more important than ever before as volume is essential for survival.

Rising Costs and Global Competition: Across North America, manufacturers are facing steep increases in raw-material and labor costs. These shifts have forced companies to raise prices simply to preserve margin, even as foreign competitors flood the market with lower-cost alternatives. For commercial teams, this environment demands sharper cost visibility and more dynamic pricing. Without accurate, real-time data on cost structures and customer elasticity, organizations struggle to defend share, communicate value, or adjust offers fast enough to stay competitive.

Digital Lag: Finally, industrial marketing is undergoing a painful digital transition. While 77% of B2B buyers now research independently before talking to a salesperson[4], two-thirds of industrial firms say their digital content isn't converting, and 64% struggle to prove ROI[5]. Traditional channels like trade shows remain vital, but digital presence increasingly determines visibility—and success.

[3] CADDi Co Ltd. 2018. "Parts Proliferation: The Junk Drawer of Manufacturing Chaos." Caddi.com. CADDi | Manufacturing Intelligence Made Simple. 2018. https://us.caddi.com/resources/insights/parts-proliferation-the-junk-drawer-of-manufacturing-chaos?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

[4] Coykendall, John, Kate Hardin, John Morehouse, and Steve Shepley. 2024. "2025 Manufacturing Industry Outlook." Deloitte Insights. Deloitte. November 19, 2024. https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/manufacturing-industrial-products/manufacturing-industry-outlook.html.

[5] Harris, Nathan. 2025. "Manufacturing Marketing Challenges of 2025 (and How to Fix Them)." Npws.net. May 23, 2025. https://www.npws.net/blog/manufacturing-marketing-challenges

These structural issues ripple across every layer of the commercial organization—manifesting differently for sales, product management, and channel marketing (Exhibit 2). Together, they create a widening gap between what the market demands and what the organization can deliver in real time.

Sales Challenges: Sales teams often struggle to get the data they need, when they need it. Key information—customer order history, open opportunities, pricing approvals, or contract terms—is scattered across multiple systems. Simple tasks like checking delivery timelines or margin impact can require multiple hand-offs and hours of manual effort. As sales cycles lengthen and customer expectations rise, this lag directly affects responsiveness and conversion.

Product Management Challenges: Product managers face a similar data disconnect. They must align technical, financial, and market inputs, but these are rarely linked. Production costs may sit in ERP systems, customer feedback in CRM tools, and competitive pricing in spreadsheets. Without real-time, integrated visibility, decisions on price changes, product rationalization, or new-product launches are made slowly—and often reactively—reducing the organization's ability to capture value.

Channel Marketing & Sales Operations Challenges: For channel and marketing teams, the pain lies in effective business forecasting & measuring effectiveness of spend. MDF allocations, promotional campaigns, and partner incentives are difficult to track in real time. Many organizations lack a closed feedback loop that ties marketing spend to sales outcomes, making it hard to predict ROI or identify underperforming partners early. Moreover, poor data creates challenges in demand forecasting, leading to ineffective planning.

Exhibit 2

These challenges provide multiple opportunities, addressing which, teams can unlock substantial productivity

Sales & Business Development

- Can I shortlist best-fit products before I meet my customers?
- What other latent or future needs can I speak to them about?
- How can I rapidly address customer queries on prices, order status, and back-office tasks?
- Can I get real time matching of our inventory with my customer needs?
- How do I get my technical questions answered real-time?
- How can pipeline tracking and updates with more efficient – saving time on manual data entry?

Product Managers

- Can I get better pulse on competitive moves (price changes, new products) and market trends
- How do I better understand the value my products create & tie pricing closely with it?
- How can I identify leakage faster and price effectively to preserve or grow margin?
- Can I get early indication for portfolio churn? How do I streamline my portfolio more effectively?
- How can I continuously improve my forecasts to support OTD & optimal inventory

Marketing & Sales Ops

- Can we get early signals on missing / shifting demand? How do we better direct the sales team?
- Can we predict churn before it happens?
- Which accounts have untapped demand?
- How do we adjust campaigns in real time based on inventory and production?
- Can we spot performance gaps early—before they impact sales?
- Can we view campaign ROI and performance in one dashboard?

Across all three roles, the core issue is the same: fragmented data and disconnected systems make even routine commercial work cumbersome. The result is slower decision-making, reduced agility, and missed growth opportunities.

Overcoming these barriers requires a unified, data-driven foundation—one that connects teams, systems, and decisions in real time. The next chapter explores how AI can help industrials build exactly that.

Opportunities to Transform the Commercial Function with AI

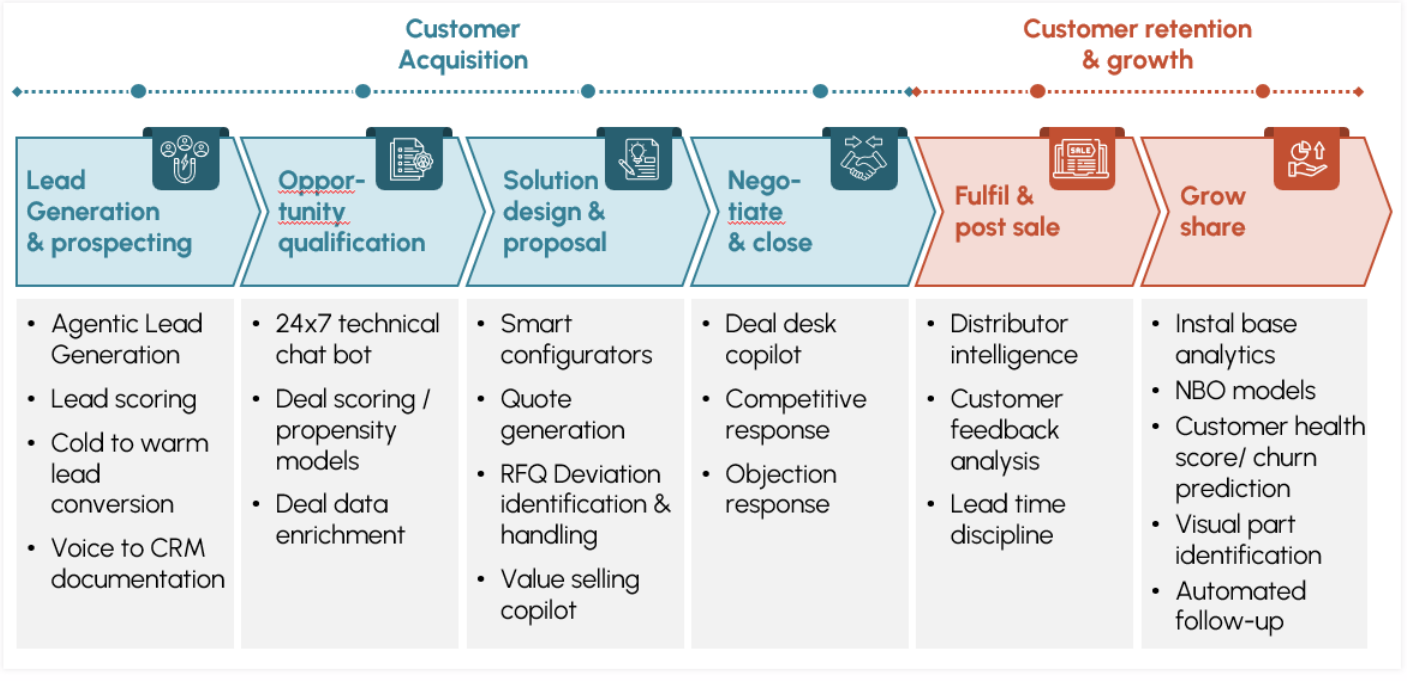
Industrial companies have spent years wrestling with fragmented systems, lost institutional knowledge, and slow manual processes. Now, advances in artificial intelligence provide the tools to break through these structural barriers. When applied systematically, AI can unify data, streamline workflows, and shift the commercial function from reactive execution to predictive, insight-driven growth.

1. Reimagining Sales

Sales organizations remain the lifeblood of growth—but they're burdened by disjointed data, repetitive documentation, and reactive engagement. AI can change that by embedding intelligence into every stage of the customer journey (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3

Sales view: AI applications across the sales lifecycle



At the front end, AI-driven prospecting tools can continuously scan internal and external data to identify new leads, enrich CRM records, and even predict which existing customers are most likely to buy next. This automation expands the top of the funnel while freeing sales teams from manual list-building.

During opportunity development, large-language-model (LLM) assistants can interpret customer specifications, pull relevant product information, and draft proposals in real time. Product-configurator algorithms can match technical requirements with available SKUs, producing accurate quotes in hours instead of days.

Once the proposal is in motion, AI-enabled pricing engines simulate different price-volume combinations, helping reps tailor offers that balance competitiveness and profitability. After the sale, predictive models track buying patterns and service data to identify cross-sell and spare-part opportunities before the customer asks.

By embedding automation and intelligence throughout the sales cycle, AI shifts sales teams from chasing data to managing relationships—and from reacting to demand to proactively shaping it.

2. Empowering Product Management

Product managers sit at the nexus of the commercial organization, translating technical capabilities into market value. Their biggest constraint has always been visibility—seeing clearly across cost, customer, & competitive dimensions. AI bridges these silos (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4

Product Manager's perspective: Emerging use-cases that can unlock productivity & better decision making

Market intelligence	Product development	Margin management	SIOP	Productivity & decision support
Market sensing & trends detection	Requirement translations	Dynamic pricing	Demand forecasting	Automate business review
Competitive intelligence & action log	Product gap assessment	Cost pass through optimization	Predictive product obsolescence	Automated Dashboards
Portfolio rationalization	R&D spend effectiveness	Margin analytics		Customer churn & segmentation

Machine-learning models can analyze cost and margin data across thousands of SKUs to detect leakage and flag unprofitable combinations. Natural-language engines can monitor market news, competitor announcements, and customer feedback to provide early signals of shifting demand or emerging threats.

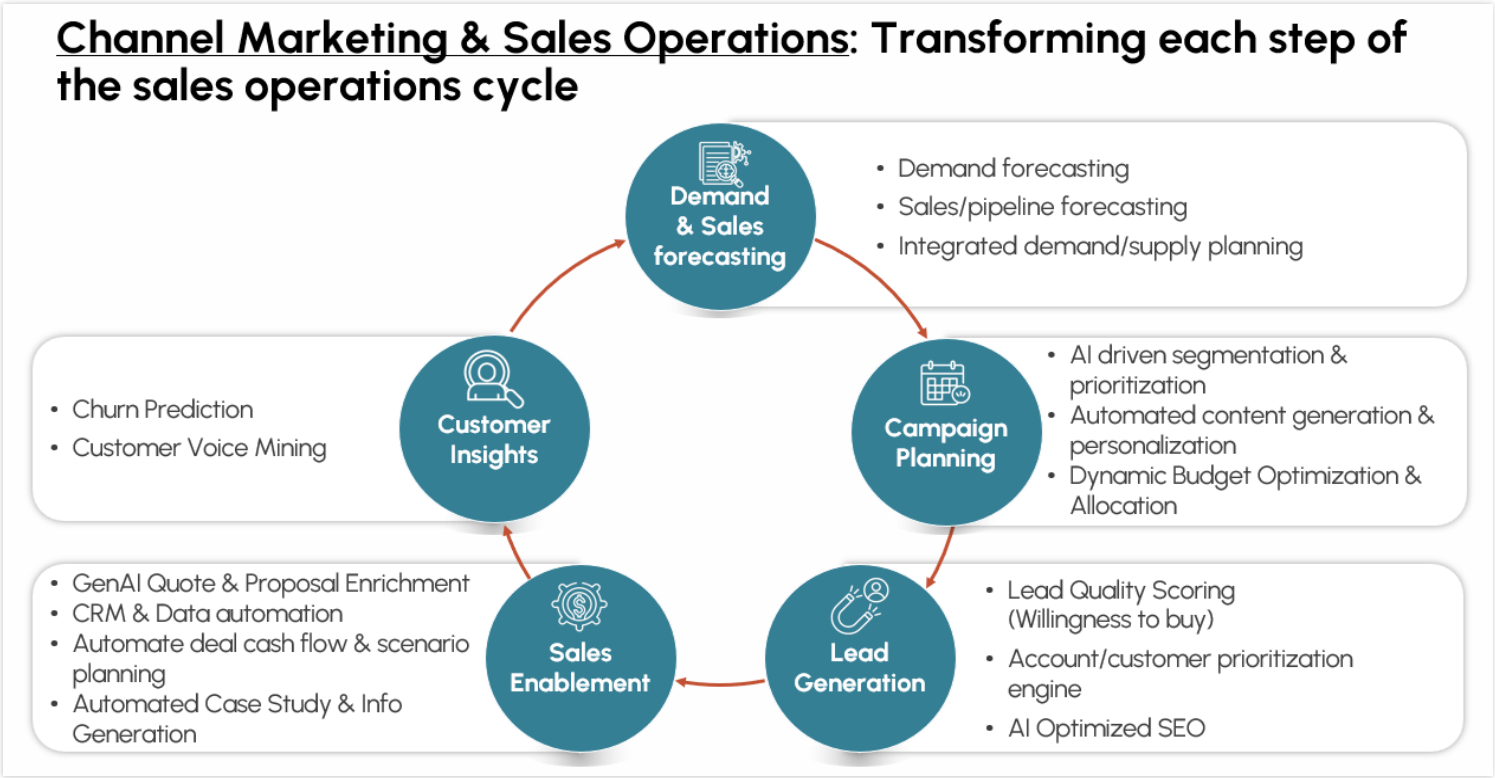
Dynamic-pricing systems use transaction history, customer segments, and willingness-to-pay indicators to recommend price adjustments that capture value without sacrificing volume. At the same time, generative-AI tools can help rationalize part libraries and document technical specifications—preserving knowledge that might otherwise disappear as experienced engineers retire.

Together, these applications give product managers real-time visibility and foresight, enabling faster decisions and tighter alignment between what is produced and what the market values.

3. Transforming Channel Marketing & Sales Operations

If sales delivers execution and product defines the offer, channel marketing and sales operations determine how effectively both connect with the market. AI now enables these functions to become dynamic, self-optimizing systems that sense and respond in real time. (Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5



Signal-detection models scrape external sources to identify emerging demand trends and competitor activity. This intelligence feeds campaign planning, where generative-AI tools can rapidly create content, adjust messaging, and optimize budgets based on live performance data.

On the execution side, AI-based lead-scoring engines help prioritize inbound opportunities, while automated analytics link marketing spend to sales conversion—closing the feedback loop that most industrials currently lack. Voice- and sentiment-analysis models can mine distributor or customer conversations to flag satisfaction issues early, guiding proactive outreach.

Over time, these tools allow marketing and operations teams to reallocate funds dynamically, focusing on the highest-return activities and partners. The result is a marketing engine that continuously learns, refines, and amplifies its impact.

Across sales, product, and marketing, AI eliminates the barriers that have long slowed industrial commercial teams. Data becomes connected, insights become instant, and decisions become continuous rather than episodic.

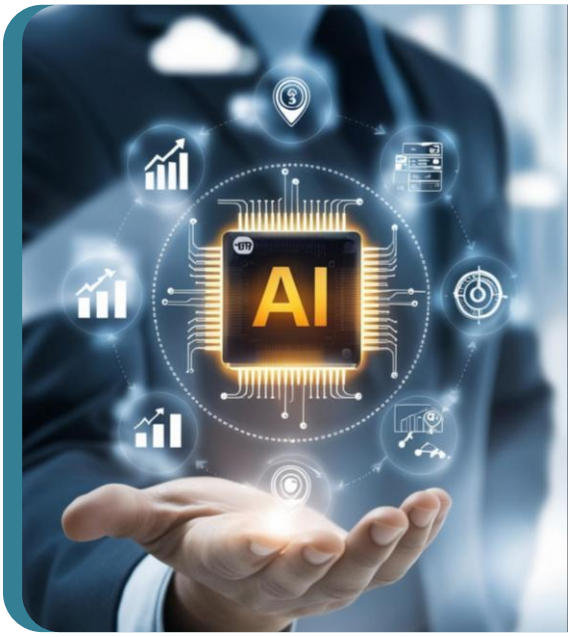
Sales teams gain foresight into customer needs, product managers make faster and smarter portfolio calls, and marketers see—often in real time—what works and what doesn't. With these capabilities in place, the commercial function transforms from a set of parallel activities into an integrated growth system.

The next step is to see what this transformation looks like in action. In the following chapter, we highlight a few high-impact AI use cases—ranging from digital product configurators to automated pricing tool and real-time competitor price scan—that demonstrate how these technologies can deliver measurable value across the commercial organization.

AI in Action in Transforming Commercial Function

The shift to AI-enabled commercial excellence isn't theoretical—it's already reshaping how industrials sell, price, and compete. Across organizations, early adopters are deploying targeted AI solutions that cut through long-standing inefficiencies and deliver measurable gains in speed, transparency, and margin.

The following use cases—Digital Product Configurator, Automated Pricing Tool, and Competitor Price Scan—illustrate how focused AI applications can deliver outsized impact across the commercial value chain.



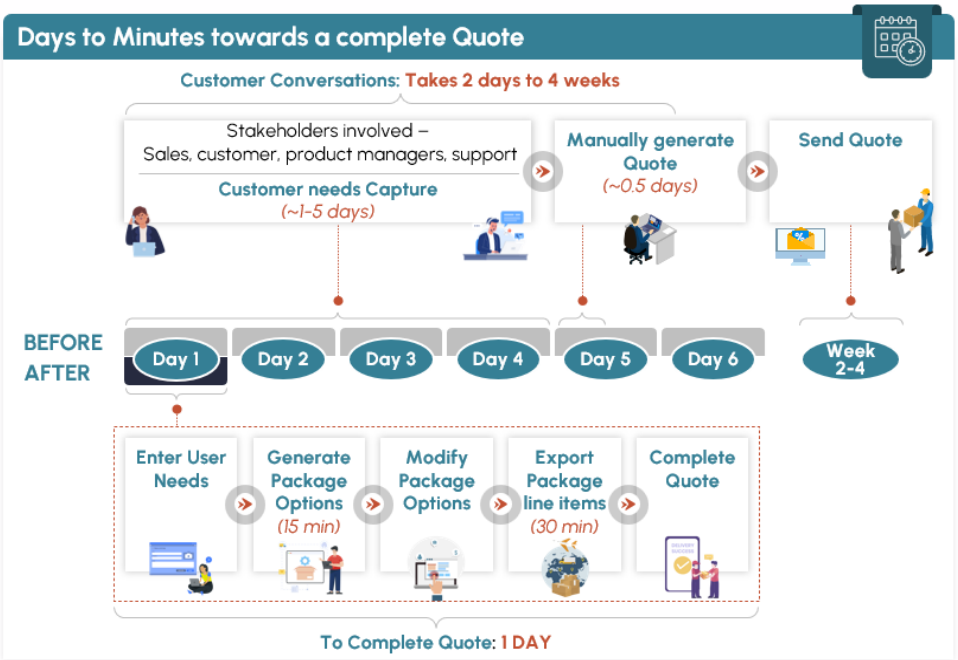
1. Digital Product Configurator – From Weeks to a Day

The Challenge: For many industrial companies, responding to customer RFQs is a slow, resource-intensive process. Generating a quote can take anywhere from two days to four weeks, involving multiple teams—sales, product managers, and customer support—just to capture requirements, identify compatible products, and build a formal quote. The delay not only frustrates customers but also reduces conversion rates and strains commercial bandwidth.

The AI Solution: A digital product configurator automates the entire quotation process. Built on a rules-based AI engine, it captures user inputs, interprets specifications, and generates compatible product configurations within minutes. Once validated, the system automatically exports line items and generates a full quote—cutting the end-to-end response time from weeks to a single day (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6

Smart Configurator: Transforming customer experience by collapsing RFQ response time from 2-4 weeks to 1 day



The Impact: This transformation doesn't just save time—it redefines customer experience. Sales teams can now respond to complex technical requests faster, customers receive accurate and customized quotes almost instantly, and product managers are free from repetitive query handling. The configurator shortens the sales cycle dramatically while increasing customer satisfaction and win rates.

2. Automated Pricing Tool – Bringing Speed and Transparency to Pricing Decisions

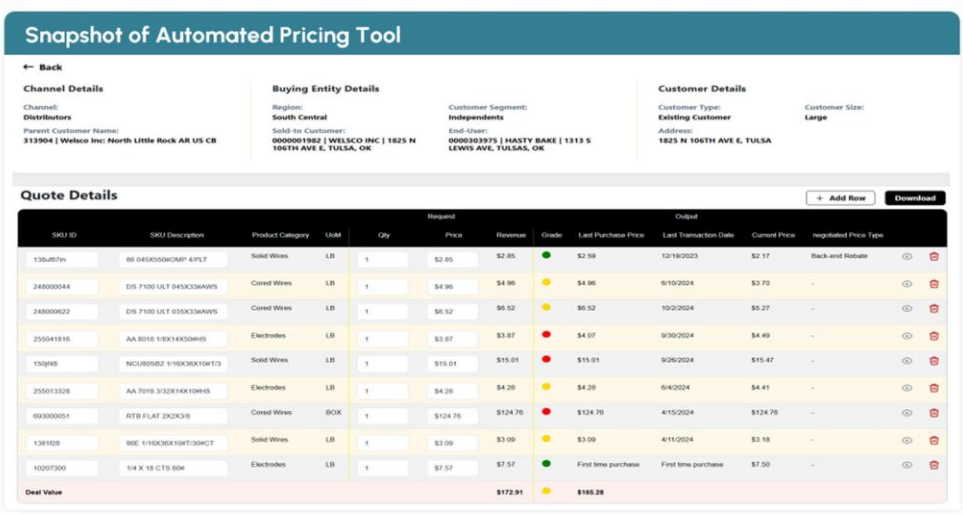
The Challenge: Pricing in industrials is often a manual, inconsistent process. Sales and product teams rely on outdated spreadsheets or ad hoc inputs, which leads to delays in approval, limited transparency, and inconsistent decisions. Newer sales reps in particular struggle to find relevant pricing benchmarks or understand how to position offers competitively.

The Solution: An automated pricing tool, powered by AI, centralizes and simplifies pricing decisions (Exhibit 7). It aggregates data from prior transactions, customer segments, and competitive benchmarks, generating recommended prices instantly. The tool flags straightforward "green" cases for automatic approval, while routing complex ones to product managers with pre-analyzed insights. It also detects anomalies—such as small customers with disproportionately low prices—and guides users through pricing logic based on factors like volume or customer hierarchy.

Exhibit 7

Dynamic Pricing Tool: Streamline Pricing Decisions with Automated Transparency and Efficiency

Snapshot of Automated Pricing Tool



PM Experience

- Reduces analytics load
- Faster TAT on request
- Identifies pricing anomalies
- Adds smarter logic (volume, hierarchy)

Sales Experience

- Faster TAT to customer
- Effective sales calls with pricing insights
- Supports low-frequency or niche products
- Reduced reliance on PM
- Surfaces new feature ideas for development

"I have a lot of new team members on my team where they kind of don't even know where to start looking for competitive pricing, so it's been helpful for me walking some of the guys through that"

"The less we can rely on product management for help the better"

"The tool is very useful"

The Impact: The tool reduces turnaround time for pricing requests from days to minutes, accelerates customer discussions, and minimizes dependence on product managers for routine approvals. Sales teams report better confidence and consistency in pricing decisions, while product managers gain time to focus on strategic cases. The result is a faster, more transparent pricing process that boosts responsiveness and margin discipline.

3. Competitor Price Scan – Real-Time Market Intelligence for Margin Uplift

The Challenge: Industrial companies often struggle to keep track of competitors' pricing and availability, relying on outdated or anecdotal data. Manual research limits visibility into real-time market shifts, making it difficult to refine pricing strategies or detect early signs of margin pressure.

The AI Solution: An AI-powered web-scraping engine automates the collection of real-time pricing data from competitor websites, e-commerce platforms, and public sources. Beyond just prices, it captures signals such as product availability, promotional activity, and even sentiment indicators tied to market trends. The system aggregates and analyzes this information, identifying pricing patterns and alerting teams to sudden shifts in competitor behavior or raw-material cost changes.

The Impact: By turning external data into actionable intelligence, the price-scan tool enables dynamic pricing adjustments and early detection of market trends. Product managers can refine price corridors, identify margin leakage, and proactively reposition products. The commercial team gains an always-on view of the competitive landscape—transforming pricing strategy from reactive to data-driven.

These use cases demonstrate how AI can deliver tangible impact—compressing lead times, improving pricing accuracy, and enhancing market visibility. Each application targets a specific bottleneck but together they form the foundation of a smarter, faster commercial organization.

In the next section introduces a prioritization framework to help organizations decide which use cases to pursue first, based on impact and scalability.

Prioritizing AI Investments in Commercial Excellence

While AI's potential across the commercial function is vast, not all use cases are created equal. The real challenge for industrial organizations is where to start—which applications to deploy first, and how to scale impact sustainably across sales, product management, and channel marketing.

The Three Dimensions of Prioritization

Successful deployment depends on balancing three critical dimensions:

Tech Ease: How readily can the use case be implemented given data availability, system maturity, and integration requirements?

Compounding Effect: How widely does the use case influence the organization—spanning roles, functions, or business units?

Tangible Impact: How much does the needle move on core outcomes such as revenue growth, cost reduction, or time savings?

These three dimensions rarely peak simultaneously. Some use cases deliver immediate gains but limited cross-functional value; others compound impact across teams but require more sophisticated data infrastructure. The "golden zone" lies where data is accessible, use-case has potential to scale to other functions & roles, and its outcomes both grow the revenue funnel, reduces cost, and free up capacity.

Illustrative Use Cases

The exhibit 8 below highlights three representative use cases across these vectors:

1. Aftermarket Sales Recommendation – A high-impact, easy-to-deploy application that leverages existing order and product data to recommend cross-sell or repeat-purchase opportunities. With minimal CRM integration, it can boost wallet share and sales efficiency almost immediately.

High Tech Ease | Medium Compounding | High Tangible Impact

2. Demand Intelligence Engine – A more complex but far-reaching capability that uses customer, macroeconomic, and production data to anticipate demand shifts. It enhances planning, improves forecast accuracy, and strengthens collaboration across commercial, operations, and finance teams.

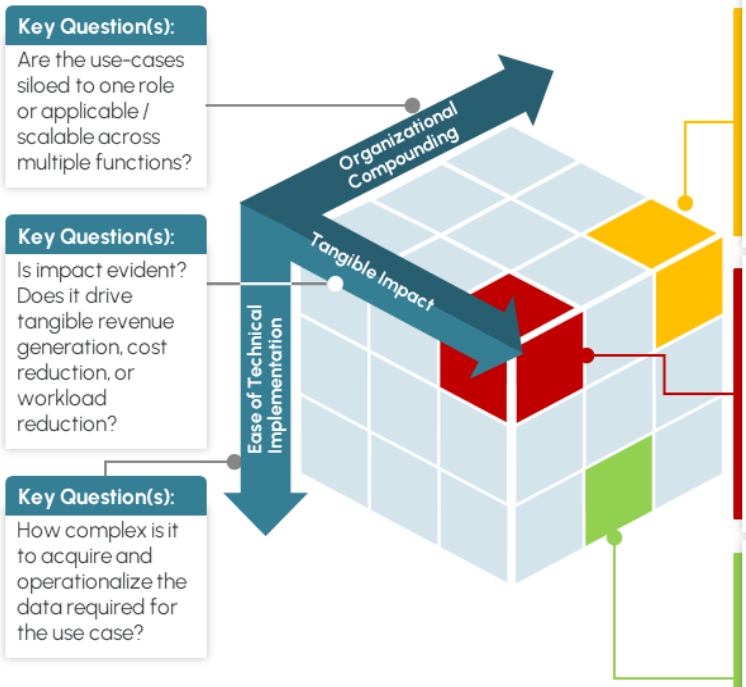
Low Tech Ease | High Compounding | High Tangible Impact

3. Agentic Lead Generation – An automation-heavy, AI-agent system that scales outbound prospecting across channels. While technically demanding and siloed within sales, it can substantially expand the top of the funnel with minimal incremental labor.

Low Tech Ease | Low Compounding | High Tangible Impact

Exhibit 8

Solving for impact, low technical load, & prospect of organization scalability will provide early wins & demand for broader adoption



Demand Intelligence:
Predicts shifts in demand using customer & macro data, improving forecast accuracy and inventory alignment

- **Tech Ease:** Low – Requires sentiment data, market context, and product data streamlined in real time
- **Compounding:** High – Improves production planning, eases sales process, and strengthens financial forecasting
- **Tangible Impact**: High – Significant cost savings due to improved production planning, improves working capital position

Agentic Lead Generation:
Leverages AI agents to automate outbound emailing during lead generation phase, increasing top of sales funnel opportunities

- **Tech Ease:** Low – Outbound data is incredibly fragmented, requires multi-channel integration, and coordination between agents to avoid duplication
- **Compounding:** Low – Automated outbound only helps offload the workload of salespeople
- **Tangible Impact**: High – Expands sales funnel massively with minimal labor effort

Aftermarket Sales:
Analyze customer purchase history to automatically recommend sales, boosting revenue per customer opportunity with lower manual effort

- **Tech Ease:** High - Order history & product data readily available, requires simple CRM integration
- **Compounding:** Medium – Streamlines salesperson outreach and reveals valuable insights for product managers regarding demand and customer profiles
- **Tangible Impact**: High – Drives significant expansion of revenue per customer

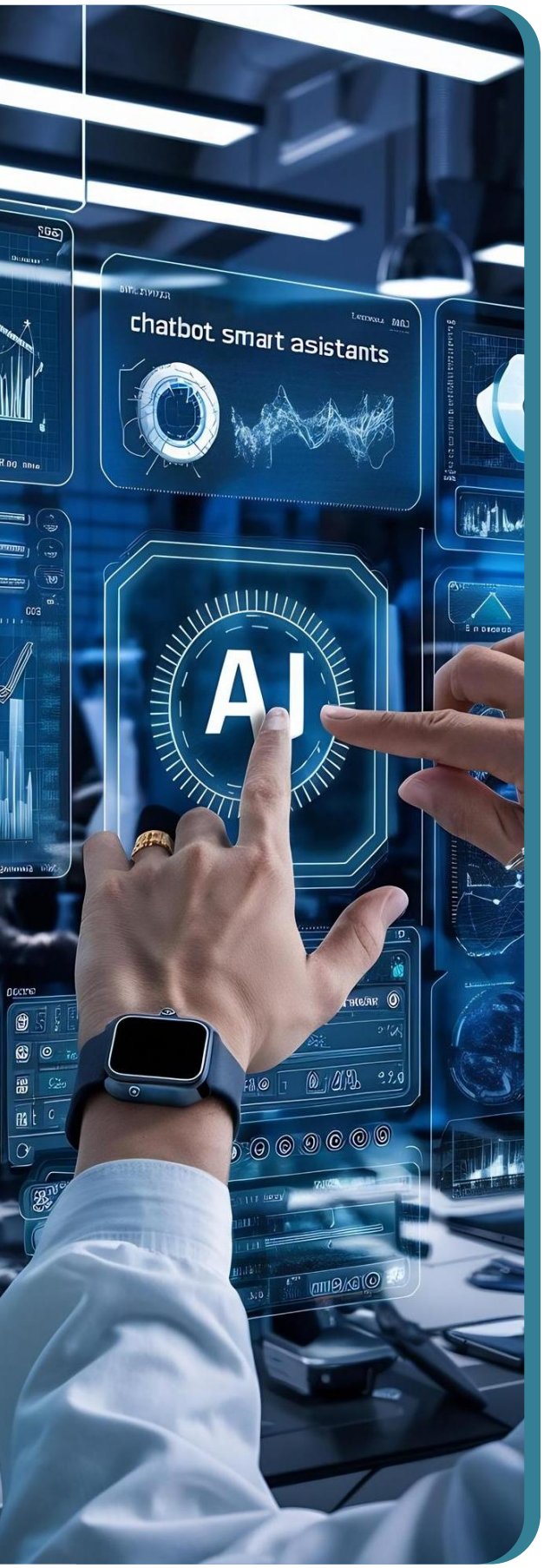
These examples illustrate how commercial leaders can map their AI priorities—some "no-brainers" for quick wins, others strategic bets requiring greater cross-functional readiness.

Turning Framework into Action

For each organization, the next step is introspection: **what's truly ready today**?

- How clean and connected is the data in your CRM and ERP systems?
- What collaboration pathways exist between sales, product managers, and channel marketers?
- Which use cases align with your current technology stack and talent readiness?

By overlaying these realities on the Tech Ease–Compounding–Tangible Impact framework, firms can identify high-ROI starting points and sequence their AI journey logically—capturing near-term value while building the foundation for long-term transformation.



AI is redefining what commercial excellence means for industrial organizations. The winners will not be those that chase every new technology, but those that deploy AI deliberately—starting with high-impact, data-ready use cases and scaling through compounding effects across sales, product, and marketing. As clean data, connected systems, and cross-functional collaboration take root, commercial teams will move from reactive execution to predictive, insight-driven growth. The result is not just faster quoting or smarter pricing, but a fundamentally more intelligent, resilient, and revenue-generating commercial engine—built to thrive in the next industrial decade.

THANK YOU