EUROPEAN MANUFACTURING SURVEY REPORT 2026

The relationship gap

How European manufacturers are managing their most important customers

SuperOffice

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Introduction

What we asked,
and what came back.

Manufacturing is one of the industries we hear from most, and one of the least researched when it comes to how companies actually manage their customers day to day. Most existing research on manufacturing looks at supply chains, energy costs, or talent. Almost none of it looks at the customer relationship itself. So we asked, not what manufacturers aspire to do, but what they actually do.

This report is based on an original survey of 161 decision-makers at manufacturing companies across Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Denmark, in commercial, sales, and customer-facing leadership roles.

The picture that came back wasn't what we expected going in. Most manufacturers haven't skipped CRM, they've just ended up running several systems at once, none of them talking to each other. That's the thread running through everything that follows: growth, cost, and risk, all shaped by the same root cause.

Executive summary

Fragmented customer data undermines growth ambitions despite CRM being a top priority.

Most mid-sized companies view improving customer relationship management (CRM) as a high or top commercial priority, with 50.9% ranking it at the top of their agenda and 49.1% citing revenue growth from existing customers as the most valued outcome.

However, only 14.9% have a structured, proactive CRM approach; the majority rely on informal or reactive practices, leaving customer data scattered across ERP, CRM, spreadsheets, and email. This fragmentation leads to operational inefficiencies: 42.8% spend at least four hours weekly searching for or updating customer information, and only 46.6% feel confident in their view of top accounts.

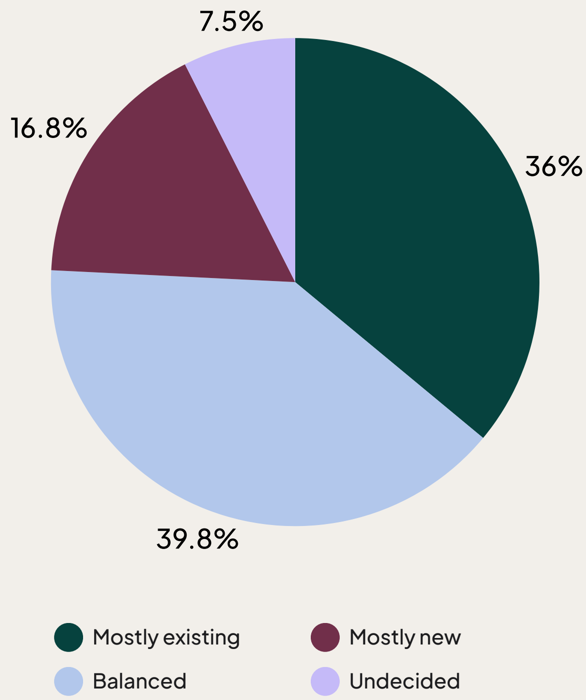
To unlock growth and reduce risk, companies must formalise CRM processes, integrate data sources, and prioritise early warning systems for at-risk customers. Leadership should act now to transform CRM from a tactical tool into a strategic growth engine.

Manufacturers know where growth is coming from

Ask a manufacturing leader where next year's revenue will come from, and most won't say new business.

Half of manufacturers rate improving customer relationship management as a high or top priority over the next 12 months.

Expected revenue growth mix: existing vs. new customers



76%

expect growth mostly, or partly, from existing customers

Everyone agrees it matters. Almost no one has it figured out.

Here's the gap. Half of manufacturers say relationship management is a top priority. **Only 14.9%** actually run it that way.

62.8% describe their approach as informal or reactive. Strong relationships exist, but they live in people's heads, not in a system.

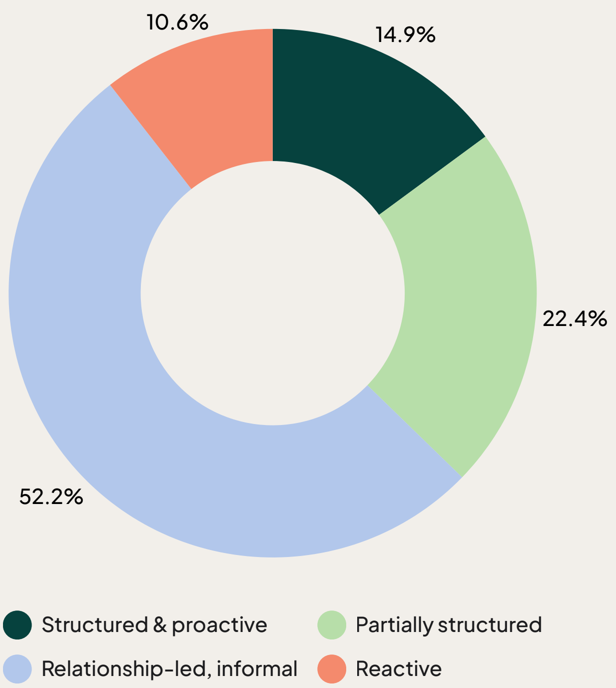
Only 46.6%

feel confident they have a complete, current view of their top ten customers

> Asking sales reps to fill in 50 customized fields isn't realistic... It's better to start simple and gradually expand.

selux

CRM maturity across manufacturers



Structure changes outcomes

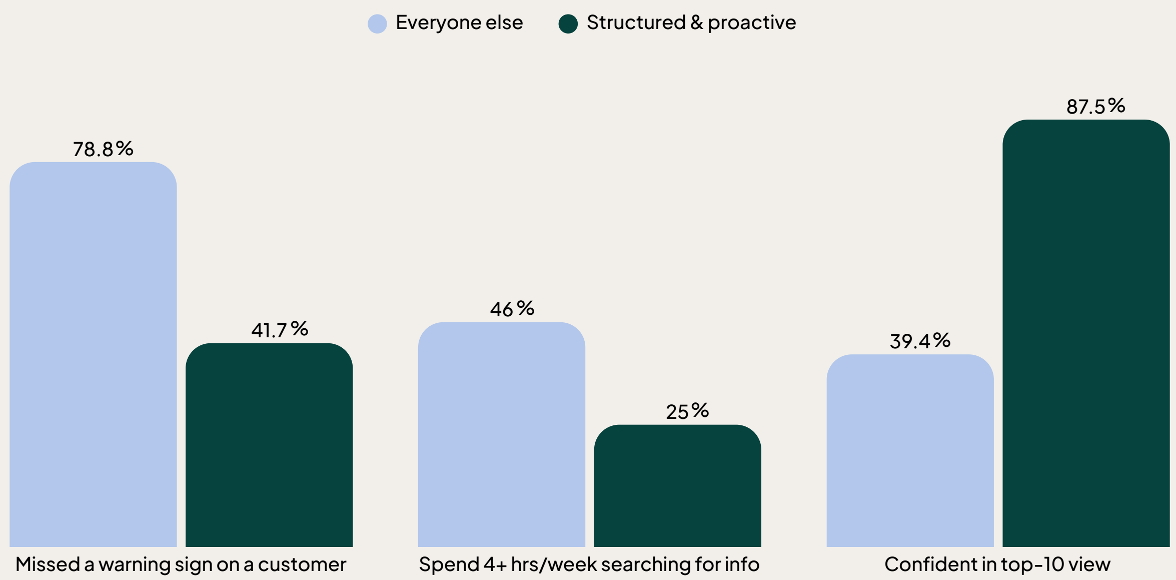
Manufacturers with a structured, proactive approach look measurably different on three fronts. They're noticebly more confident in their view oftop accounts, likely to miss a warning sign on a customer, and spend far less time hunting for basic information.

Confidence in top accounts

87.5% of manufacturers with a structured, proactive approach feel confident they have a complete view of their top ten customers. For everyone else, that drops to 39.4%

The cost of not having it

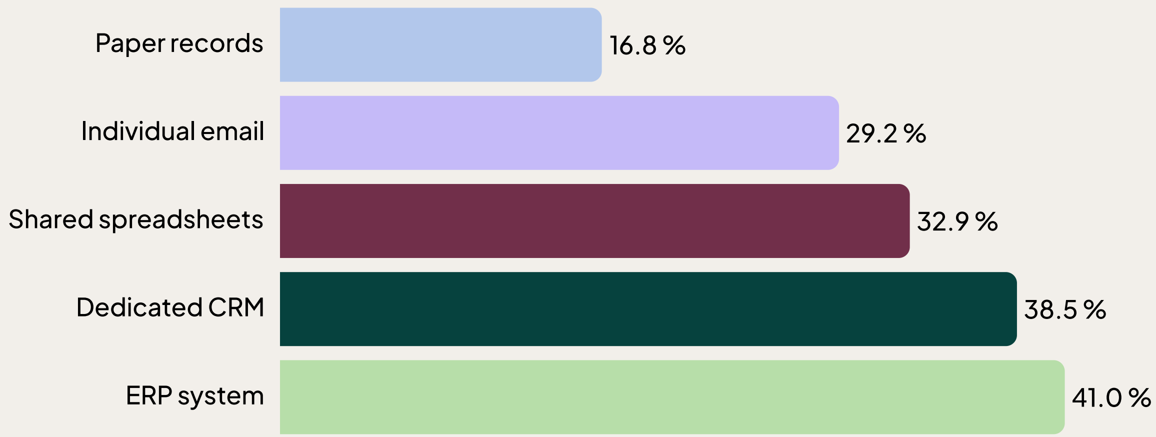
Manufacturers without that structure are nearly twice as likely to have missed a warning sign on a customer, and almost twice as likely to spend 4+ hours a week just searching for information.



Customer data doesn't live in one place. It lives in five.

The instinct is to assume manufacturers just haven't adopted a CRM yet. The data says otherwise. ERP is the single most common home for customer data. Dedicated CRM is close behind. Many manufacturers run several of these systems at once, none of them talking to each other.

Where customer information lives today



An ERP was built to track orders, not relationships

Layer CRM and spreadsheets on top, and the real cost isn't picking the right tool, it's that none of them sync. The same customer's history gets rebuilt from memory every time someone new picks up the account.

Three ways scattered data quietly drains the business

Manufacturers are counting on **existing customers** for growth, while running an early warning system that mostly doesn't warn early.

TIME

42.8%

of teams spend four or more hours a week just searching for or updating customer information. Half a working day, every week, spent looking instead of selling.

REVENUE

34.8%

say missing chances to upsell or expand with existing customers is a recurring problem, on the very accounts most manufacturers are counting on for growth.

RISK

13%

catch a struggling customer early through regular monitoring. A third only find out once a customer is already unhappy, and it's serious.

> "Now we know when the customer service request comes in, who's responsible, which company it's connected to. And our sales reps have access to all communication, knowing what's happening to the customer, like, when the last maintenance was done."

Job Schmidt, Managing Director, Boix Europe

The most common problems trace back to fragmented data

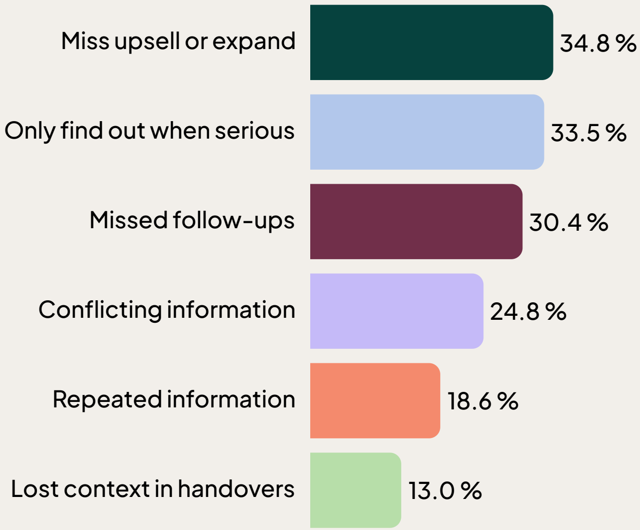
More than seven in ten manufacturers either know they've lost a customer they could have saved, or can't rule it out.

The data below shows why: fragmented information means signals get missed, follow-ups fall through the cracks, and the same problems keep repeating.

13%

spot a struggling customer through proactive monitoring. Most find out some other way, often too late.

What happens more often than it should



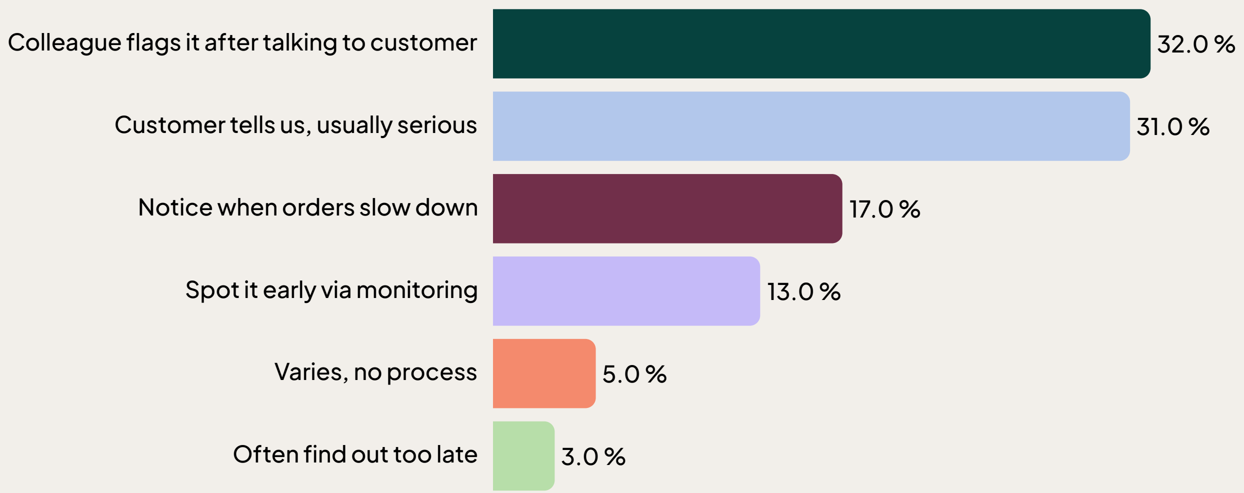
The moment a customer goes quiet

Most manufacturers find out a key account is unhappy after someone else already knows.

31%

only hear it from the customer directly, usually when it's already serious.

How manufacturers find out if a customer is unhappy



What manufacturers want CRM to fix

Growth from existing accounts tops the list, echoing exactly where manufacturers already said their growth is coming from.

Where manufacturers expect growth from

> "Instead of making 500 offers left and right, we now only make 250 high-quality offers to prospects that fit our target. This means less work, less administration, and a lot of money saved."
>
> Job Schmidt
> Managing Director, Boix Europe

The gap looks a little different in every market

The overall pattern holds everywhere, but the pressure point moves from one market to the next.

🇳🇱 Netherlands

100% rate CRM improvement high or top priority.

78% rely on shared spreadsheets, the most of any market.

🇸🇪 Sweden

61.7% feel confident in top-account visibility.

Over half expect growth mainly from existing customers.

🇩🇪 Germany

More than 1 in 3 CRM improvement high or top priority.

Just 11% feel completely confident in account visibility.

🇩🇰 Denmark

80% expect most growth from existing customers, the highest of any market.

60% say they're missing upsell on those same accounts.

The takeaway isn't that one market has it solved. Any solution needs enough flexibility to meet each market where it actually is.

The fix is process, not more software

The tools already exist. What's missing is the discipline to use them well.

For commercial leaders

This isn't an IT backlog item. It's a revenue protection plan. You can't grow from existing customers you can't see clearly.

For sales and account teams

The signals are already there, in inboxes, spreadsheets, and conversations. What's missing is a single place to see them and a clear owner for each account.

For operations

The tools mostly already exist. What's missing is the discipline to keep one system current, instead of four systems partly current.

Three moves to make now

1. Audit where customer information actually lives today, not where it's supposed to live.
2. Give every key account a named owner responsible for keeping it current.
3. Build a regular cadence for reviewing account health, before a customer has to tell you something's wrong.

In summary

The relationship gap is real, and it's fixable.

Manufacturers already know where their growth is coming from. Most are betting on the customers they've already won, not the ones they haven't met yet.

What they don't have, in most cases, is a system built to protect that bet. Half call relationship management a top priority. Only 14.9% actually run it like one. The rest are relying on memory, habit, and whoever happens to answer the phone.

That gap isn't a technology problem. It's not that manufacturers have ignored CRM. If anything, they've adopted too much, ERP here, a CRM there, a spreadsheet everyone still trusts more than either. Four half-systems, none of them talking to each other, are quietly doing the job that one system should.

The cost shows up in ordinary ways. Hours lost to searching instead of selling. Upsell opportunities that never get raised. Customers who go quiet, and don't get noticed until they're already gone. None of this requires reinventing how manufacturers sell. It requires bringing what already exists, the conversations, the history, the context, into one place, and giving someone the job of keeping it current.

That's a smaller ask than it sounds. And it's the difference between hoping the growth plan works, and knowing it will.

CASE STUDY — BOIX EUROPE

From scattered spreadsheets to 250 high-quality offers

Boix Europe makes tray-forming machines for the food industry. Before SuperOffice CRM, customer records lived in Word, Excel and Outlook. As the company grew, keeping track got harder.

Industry	Location	Online since
Packaging machinery	Netherlands	2020

THE CHALLENGE

One shared inbox for every customer inquiry. No one was sure what had been handled and what had fallen through.

THE SOLUTION

Sales and service consolidated onto one CRM. Every ticket, machine and contact tied to one record.

THE RESULT

500 scattered offers became 250 targeted ones. Same headcount, higher turnover.

> "Having SuperOffice CRM allows us to increase our turnover without the risk of losing control. The same number of people can now manage more projects."

Job Schmidt
Managing Director, Boix Europe

Read Boix Europe's full story, and other manufacturing case studies:
superoffice.com/customers/manufacturing

SuperOffice is a leading European CRM provider, trusted by manufacturers who want to turn customer relationships into long-term business growth.

Already have a CRM? The real gain isn't having one, it's having everything in it. SuperOffice CRM brings sales, marketing, and service into one place, built for complex sales cycles and long-term accounts manufacturing runs on.

With 30+ years of experience in CRM, SuperOffice is a partner for manufacturers building profitable, lasting relationships.

For more insights and to carry on the conversation, get in touch:

superoffice.com