

Industry 4.0 to deliver the foundation for manufacturing's future

 By [Kate Mollett](#)

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Faced with customer demands that are evolving faster than ever and the pressure of ongoing economic uncertainty, manufacturers are turning to digital transformation to meet future needs.

More efficient operations, a deeper knowledge of customers and bringing new products to market at speed is resulting in the emergence of Industry 4.0 to deliver the foundation for manufacturing's future.

The financial benefits could be significant. Manufacturers in EMEA believe that their digital investments will drive revenue growth of 13% over the next five years, while the sector's digital leaders are already deriving over 50% of their revenue from digitally-enhanced or digitally-led products and services.

Clearly, manufacturers are becoming more dependent on digital, but with this reward comes risk. The proliferation of digital has significantly increased the challenges for IT teams charged with ensuring business continuity, while making IT downtime more damaging than ever.



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Kate Mollett 12 Oct 2018



The migration to digital is becoming the cornerstone of every part of the manufacturing process. From the early stages of design and development, through to operations and finally distribution. The manufacturing sector is moving towards the point where virtually everything will depend on digital. In a fast-moving and highly competitive environment, making the best use of this and acting on the insights it delivers could be central to securing a place in the future.

Digital pressure

But manufacturers' growing dependence on digital is putting IT teams under pressure to ensure business continuity. However, the sheer scale and complexity of manufacturers' digital lives make this a growing challenge. Data presents a number of pitfalls ranging from determining where and how it is stored to ensuring it is properly protected and quickly recoverable in the event of a disaster.

IT teams are also faced with significant external threats. Cyber attacks are increasingly prolific and sophisticated. Think of the Liberty ransomware attack a few months ago.

Old backup technology can also present a serious hindrance. For example, many local businesses still rely on backing up their physical servers to tape. Depending on the size of the organisation, this becomes a costly exercise due to the expense of purchasing additional tape drives. And then there is still a high risk for human error as well as the lengthy process for data recovery.

The damage of downtime

Added to these pressures is the fact that any IT downtime can be extremely damaging for manufacturing businesses, where uninterrupted access to equipment, applications, data and processes is vital. Outages at any point in the process can cause havoc further down the line and have knock-on effects on staff morale, customer loyalty and the business' reputation. The financial damage, both in immediate loss and opportunity cost, can be widespread and long-lasting.

As a result, the business' demands for recovery are high. Manufacturing companies are especially vulnerable to an availability gap, where the IT team cannot meet the recovery requirements of the business. This is not uncommon across all industries; 80% of IT decision makers suffer from an availability gap, resulting in total costs of R270m per year. But in a sector where continuous operations are critical, business continuity must be a particular imperative.



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A 4-step process

It is therefore imperative that data availability becomes a priority for manufacturers. Here are a few pointers for getting it in place.

1. Create a viable business continuity plan

While creating a strategy for data availability may seem straightforward, it is incredible how many plans seem adequate until they are tested – and fail. IT teams must develop a strategy that protects every critical business unit across the supply chain, without negatively impacting the experiences of employees or partners.

2. Manage your data intelligently

Ensuring the availability of data and applications must be the main imperative of the business continuity plan. That means using solutions designed to address the continuity challenges of highly virtualised and cloud-enabled manufacturing environments. Selecting a data availability solution that can achieve a recovery time of less than 15 minutes for all applications and data should meet the requirements of most parts of the business, even when a disaster should strike.

3. Keep your business' eyes open

Visibility and ongoing monitoring are key to preventing issues and responding to them when they occur. Real-time monitoring and reporting on virtual environments enable IT teams to anticipate and address potential problems before they affect operations.

4. Protect your present and your future

Two-thirds (66%) of IT decision makers say that IT downtime is hindering their digital transformation efforts. It is critical that businesses balance the introduction of new technology while ensuring data availability, to avoid hindering the ongoing operations of the organisation. Data availability solutions can enable IT teams to test applications and upgrades before they go into production.

Building a foundation

Digital transformation is bringing immense benefits to manufacturers. Progressing towards Industry 4.0 will be critical for organisations to secure their place in the future of the sector. However, as manufacturers' dependence on digital grows, business continuity is becoming more of a business imperative.

Using the latest solutions, IT teams can build a reliable foundation of intelligent data management to underpin their digital systems. In this way, businesses can ensure that they can take advantage of new technologies with confidence and truly embrace Industry 4.0.

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