Your Practical Manufacturers Guide to AI

What Decades of
ERP Lessons Teach Us

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Manufacturers should approach AI with the same caution earned from decades of ERP experience. Technology vendors will always showcase polished demonstrations and promise breakthrough results but decisions must be built on evidence, not marketing.

Manufacturers have been sold "game-changing" technology for decades. Vendors showed polished demos, promised smooth rollouts, and claimed the system would fix everything. Reality was often different.

Today, AI is following the same pattern. Lots of hype. Lots of buzzwords. And once again, manufacturers are being told it will "transform their operations."
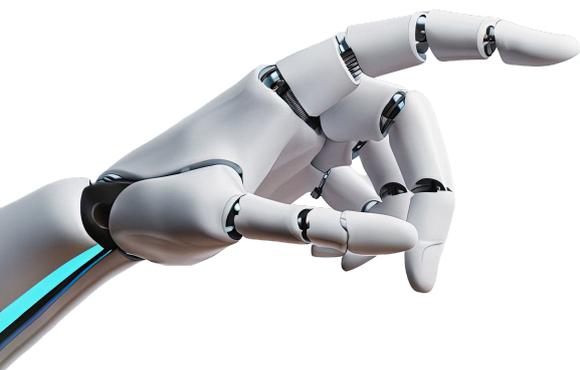
The reality:

AI only works when the basics are done right — the same basics that determine every successful (or failed) ERP project.

It's not about the algorithm.
It's not about the model.

It's about process, planning, and solving real problems — not imaginary ones.

Did you know the value gap?

As organizations worldwide advance along their unique paths of digital transformation, many encounter a growing "value gap" — the divide between the potential of technology and the results it actually delivers.

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Why Technology Fails?

Manufacturers don't fail because they pick the wrong tool. They fail because the groundwork wasn't done. History is full of examples of projects failing to meet objectives because:

- processes weren't defined
- leadership wasn't aligned
- the focus was on features, not results
- lack of agreement on what defined success.

AI has the exact same risks. No system — no matter how advanced — will fix unclear processes or poor planning.

Before adopting AI, every manufacturer should be able to answer three simple questions:

What exact problem are we fixing?

What makes AI the best for this specific issue?

What measurable results must we see in 60-90 days?

If leadership can't answer those clearly, the AI project will end up being expensive, underused, and abandoned.

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Start Simple: A Business Case

Successful ERP selection always starts with a short, clear list of requirements. AI is no different.

Manufacturers should write a 1 or 2 page document defining:

- The exact problem
- The process gaps
- The measurable result expected
- The financial impact (ROI)

This keeps the team focused on the business need, not a long list of "cool features."

Did you know?

- Many emerging technologies take longer than expected to show their true value — leaving leaders uncertain about where to invest their time and resources.

- Most organizations are chasing value, yet many still lack the right tools and meaningful measures to actually unlock it.

- Around the world, companies share a common ambition: to create tangible value. But achieving that goal often means navigating a complex and rapidly evolving technology landscape — a journey that requires thoughtful preparation.

Source: How Possible Happens, Infor, Research Report, 2025

A Successful Business Case

A great example comes from Combilift, the global forklift manufacturer. They didn't use AI because it was trendy.

They wanted to use it because they found real process problems:

- New parts staff were missing revenue
- Quotes were incomplete or inaccurate
- Customers were frustrated

They paired Infor AI with Infor CloudSuite Industrial to guide parts selection and fix the issue. Within 60 days, they realized:

- 30% increase in first-time fixes
- 40% reduction in service job costs
- 30% increase in revenue per transaction

"With new hires and less experienced staff in the parts department, we knew that there were missed revenue opportunities because of inaccurate quoting. For example, if someone wants a water pump, a trained employee knows to add a gasket. But a new hire would not, leaving the customer to go to another vendor to purchase a gasket. We are excited about the parts recommender getting smarter and smarter, so we can bring in more revenue while keeping our customers happy with a first-time fix.

Kenny Gilmour,
Global Parts Manager at Combilift

Tools like process mining make the problem definition phase easier by showing you:

- Where processes get stuck
- Where mistakes happen
- What parts of the process are not following standard flow

Trust Proof

A generic, canned presentation can make any solution look impressive, but it doesn't tell you whether the tool can support the realities of your plant, your workflows, or your constraints.

The safer approach is to judge AI solutions based on how well they align with your actual processes. Before being impressed by screens or automation, manufacturers should take the time to:

- Map out how work actually moves through their operation
- Identify where delays, rework, and inconsistencies appear
- Clarify why each process needs to change
- Define which outcomes matter most

With this clarity, you can challenge vendors to show how their solution addresses your specific process gaps, not an idealized version shown in a controlled environment.

What you need is a demonstration that speaks directly to your workflows and problem areas.

Manufacturers who evaluate AI this way quickly separate practical solutions from marketing theater.

A Simple Chart to Overcoming the Common Barriers

Barriers to Start	What do you need to do?
Not knowing where to start	Diagnose processes first; build a business case
Overwhelmed by technology updates	Focus on critical needs, not feature richness
Lack of IT resources and knowledge	Use expert-implemented solutions; don't over-customize
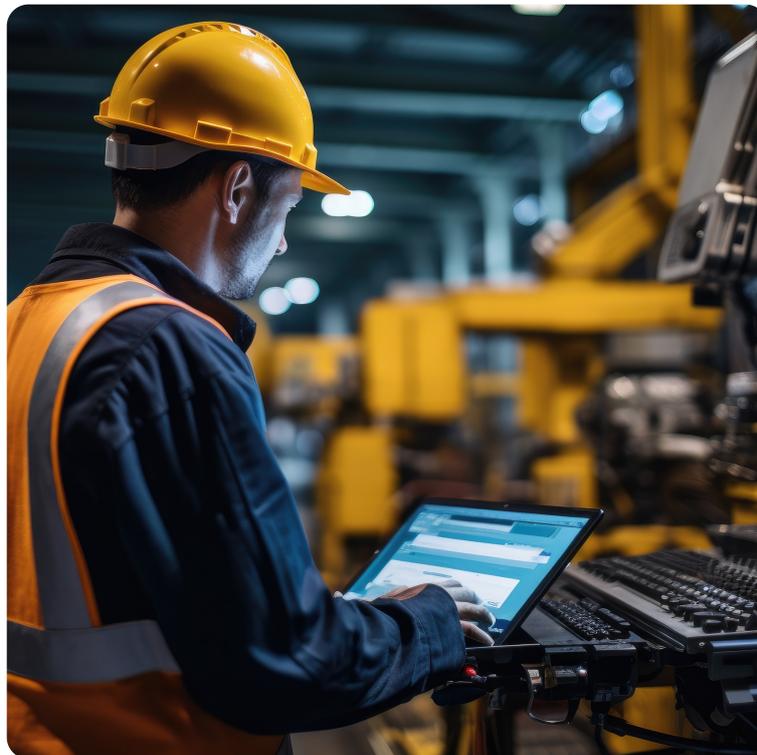
Conclusion: Trust Evidence, Not Marketing

Manufacturers have seen enough polished technology demos to know they rarely match what happens on the plant floor.

A generic demo can make any tool look impressive, but it tells you nothing about whether the solution can handle your actual workflows, constraints, or problem areas.

Instead of relying on staged demonstrations, manufacturers should look for signs that a vendor has taken the time to truly understand how your operation works today, including:

- how information moves between teams
- where delays or errors occur
- what triggers rework
- and why a process needs to change in the first place