

White Paper

The next competition will be decided in service

Why access to the customer is being redistributed during operation, and who will control it in the future.

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When the machine stops at the customer's site

Almost every machine builder knows this moment.

A machine has stopped at the plant operator's site. Production cannot continue. The call usually goes straight to service, and the expectation is clear: fast help, ideally right away.

A familiar routine now begins inside your company. First, someone has to clarify exactly which machine is involved. Then comes the search for documentation, parts lists or past service cases.



Responsibilities have to be coordinated. Spare parts are checked. Technicians or partners are brought in.

Everyone involved is committed. The experience is there, and so is the expertise. And yet time passes.

That is not because the machine is technically too complex. It is because information is scattered and processes need coordination. The real bottleneck rarely lies in the technology. It lies in the process.

What is often overlooked: The plant operator does not care how complex the manufacturer's internal organization is. All that matters is how quickly a problem gets solved.

Service thus becomes immediately visible, and it becomes measurable.

The growth hardly anyone plans for

Machine builders have consistently improved their products over decades. Quality, precision and engineering today reach a level that sets standards worldwide. At the same time, however, something is growing that is often underestimated: the installed base. With every machine delivered, the following increase permanently:

- Service requests
- Variants and software versions
- Spare parts movements
- Documentation
- Coordination effort during operation

This growth happens quietly. It does not show up in order intake but in the daily work of service. Many companies respond pragmatically. They expand teams, create additional roles or redistribute tasks.

But this is exactly where a turning point arises. While new machines are sold once, they generate service demand for years. Every additional machine permanently increases the organizational load. Service thus becomes a long-term obligation.

In the short term, adding staff works. In the long term, however, complexity grows faster than the organization can.

When experience turns into dependency

In many service organizations, experienced employees carry a considerable part of operational stability. They know:

- which machine is located where
- which special solution was installed
- which partner can be relied on for help
- which customer expects which priority

This knowledge is valuable. At the same time, it creates a dependency.

If a key person is unavailable or leaves the company, friction arises immediately. That makes service hard to plan.

Scalable service therefore does not mean less experience. It means less dependence on individual knowledge.

A typical picture from practice

More than 70 percent

of service time went into preparation and coordination.

An internationally active machine builder recently described the following situation: More than 70 percent of service time went not into the technical solution of a problem but into preparation and coordination.

Technicians were waiting for information. Spare parts were checked several times. Responsibilities had to be clarified. The actual repair often took less time than organizing it.

This pattern can be found across the industry. Service is not held back by a lack of competence. It is held back by a lack of continuity in the process.

Digitization that fizzled out

Hardly any machine builder has failed to invest in digital solutions in recent years.

CRM systems were introduced, customer portals were built, remote access to machines was enabled and documentation was digitized. Knowledge databases and first AI applications came on top of that.

This often creates isolated knowledge systems that support individual tasks but are only loosely linked with one another.



Service processes therefore still begin the same way: by email, by phone or through personal coordination.

The reason rarely lies in missing technology. What is missing is a shared structure in which everyone involved works together along a clear process.

New systems appear. Old processes remain. The system landscape thus grows faster than actual efficiency.

New conditions

Besides the operational challenges, the technical and regulatory requirements in machine building are also changing.

The Cyber Resilience Act creates, for the first time, clear requirements for digital products and connected systems across their entire life cycle.

In the future, manufacturers must be able to prove:

- which software versions are running in the field
- which components are installed
- how security updates are distributed
- who has access to systems

Service thus becomes not only an organizational task but also a regulatory responsibility.

At the same time, the amount of available machine data is growing considerably.

Modern machines today continuously deliver information about condition, usage and anomalies. Only the use of AI, however, makes it possible to evaluate this data meaningfully and turn it into concrete service decisions.

The challenge thus shifts once again: The problem is no longer collecting data. The problem is using that data in a structured way.



The perspective has changed on the plant operator's side as well.

Production companies do not invest in machine performance alone. They invest in stable processes.

Unplanned downtime has a direct impact on:

- delivery dates
- contractual penalties
- staff utilization
- energy use
- customer relationships

Plant operators therefore increasingly judge a manufacturer by its ability to solve problems in a structured way. Service becomes part of the relationship of trust.

Slow coordination

Today, a modern service case involves several organizations at once: plant operator, machine builder, component manufacturer, external service partners and material suppliers.

Each party works with its own data, its own processes and its own priorities. Coordination takes place between these separate system worlds, and that is exactly where delays arise.

Today, downtime often arises not within one company but between several parties. Service thus becomes a question of structured collaboration.

Why AI alone does not solve the problem

Artificial intelligence opens up new possibilities in service. It can:

- detect faults earlier
- identify patterns in machine data
- forecast spare parts demand
- prepare service visits
- provide guidance and pass on knowledge easily

But AI needs context.

Without a clear assignment of machines, components and responsibilities, even good analyses have no effect.

AI can detect a deviation. However, it cannot start a service process if responsibilities or data structures are missing.

Real benefit arises only when everyone involved works on a shared foundation. AI delivers its value where processes are already structured. Without structure, it remains analysis without effect.

The path to success

Companies with steadily growing service business therefore take a different approach. They do not just expand their system landscape. They also change the logic of how they work. Machines are clearly assigned digitally, relevant information is made centrally available and service processes are clearly defined.

Partners can be brought in automatically, and recurring tasks are increasingly supported by AI.

One example from practice

A machine reports that a component needs to be replaced. The machine is identified automatically, and its configuration and history are available immediately. The required spare part is identified and the responsible partner receives the order right away.

The plant operator can see status and progress without having to ask, and service begins before any coordination is needed.

The difference seems small, but its effect on daily work is considerable.

This also changes the role of the OEM. The machine builder is developing from what is currently more of a pure supplier into a long-term operating partner and accompanies machines across their entire life cycle.

This opens up new possibilities: predictable service revenue, closer customer relationships, data-based improvements as well as new business models and revenue sources.

Service thus increasingly determines margin, resale and long-term customer loyalty.

Real benefit arises only when everyone involved works on a shared foundation.

Why service needs a shared infrastructure

Many machine builders still optimize their service within their own organization. Processes are digitized and systems are extended.

But modern service processes have long since crossed company boundaries. Plant operators, manufacturers, service partners and suppliers work on the same machine at the same time. Without a shared structure, coordination effort and delays arise.

That is why cross-manufacturer service networks are increasingly emerging in machine building. They do not replace existing systems. They connect them.

They enable:

- clear identification of machines and components
- a shared data foundation for everyone involved
- structured service processes across company boundaries
- automatic inclusion of partners
- transparency across the entire life cycle

Transaction-Network

For several years, Transaction-Network has been developing an open service network that connects machine builders, plant operators and service partners on a shared working foundation. Machines, service jobs and responsibilities are clearly assigned, and information is available to authorized partners in a structured form.

The result is a continuous service process on the basis of which AI applications can prepare and coordinate processes, and on which regulatory requirements such as the Cyber Resilience Act can be met in a traceable way.

The real leadership question

For top management, this fundamentally changes the view of service. The central question today is no longer whether service will be digitized. The question is whether your own service can keep pace with the growing installed base.

Helpful questions to check:

How many service processes still start manually?

Where does knowledge depend on individual people?

How much time does your team lose to coordination?

How quickly can external partners be brought in?

These points increasingly determine growth, margin and customer satisfaction.

The strategic decision

Many machine builders currently face a quiet but far-reaching decision. They can continue to optimize service, improve processes and add systems.

Or they can ask the fundamental question: Who will structure service in our customers' operations in the future?

Will service remain an internal organizational unit, or will it become part of a shared digital infrastructure with the plant operator?

This decision does not concern efficiency alone. It concerns access to the customer.

Whoever structures the digital service relationship becomes visible during ongoing operation. Whoever does not remains interchangeable.

In the competition for follow-up orders and expansions, exactly this visibility is decisive. This is where the real strategic discussion begins.

That discussion is not about software. It is about role and position in the life cycle of the machine.

In this context, Transaction-Network sees itself not as an additional tool but as an infrastructure partner for machine builders who want to make their service organization fit for the future.

The decisive question is therefore not whether service will become digital. The question is who will structure it.

The competition is shifting

Technological differences between machines remain important. At the same time, machines are becoming more and more alike. Service capability is thus developing into a central differentiator and competitive factor.

Machine builders with structured service processes achieve shorter response times, lower organizational strain and more stable customer relationships.

At the same time, additional revenue arises across the entire life cycle of a machine.

Competition is therefore decided more and more often during the operation of the machine and no longer only at its delivery. The coming years will show which companies understand service as a strategic task.

Not every organization has to reinvent everything, but every organization has to decide how collaboration will be organized in the future. One thing is becoming increasingly clear: Machines can be optimized, but service has to be organized.

A conversation among peers

If you want to examine how structured, cross-manufacturer service can be put into practice, you can have a no-obligation expert conversation with us. At its center is one simple question:

How can service be organized so that it stays manageable, without building up additional complexity?

www.transaction-network.com

We are Transaction-Network.

The industrial service infrastructure.



Service only works when everything works together.

Machines, OEMs and plant operators form one networked system.

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