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ARE IIOT SALES STRATEGIES HOLDING UP ADOPTION OF INDUSTRY 4.0 IN MANUFACTURING?

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As Industry 4.0 matures, Industrial IOT (IIOT) platforms will be the backbone of digital transformation. But adoption depends as much on how they are sold as on what they deliver, write R Jayaraman and Aditya Gupta.

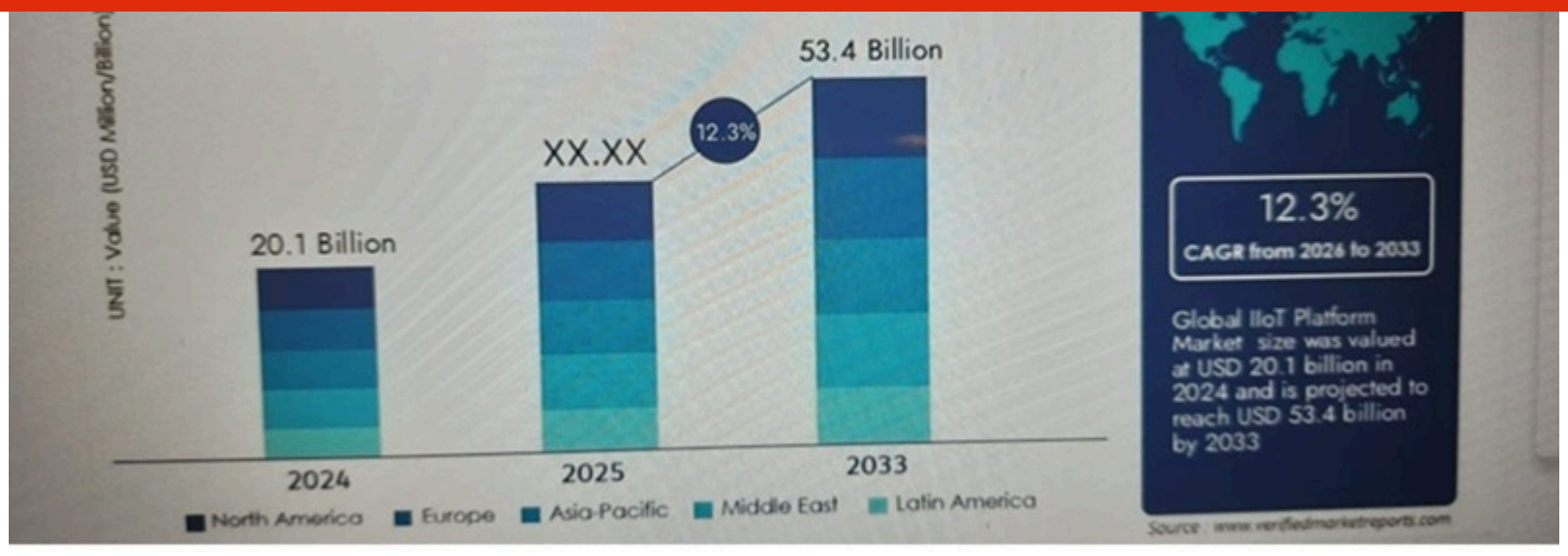
Sometime in the year 2000 the idea of Industry 4.0 was born in Germany. Automobile companies jumped on the bandwagon to not only improve efficiencies, but also as a part of an effort to address the Triple Bottom Line requirements. At that time, TBL was all about economic, societal and environmental profits. To fight against the increasing ills of skewed income distribution, widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, environmental pollution leading to acid rain and depletion in the ozone layer, companies were encouraged to adopt new practices which will lead to 'sustainability'. The word sustainability referred to reversing climate change, continued well being of planet earth and optimal use of depleting natural reserves of basic elements like iron ore, oil, water, etc.

One of the initiatives which was taken up was Industry 4.0 (I4.0). The amazing growth of the telecom industry worldwide, due to the continuous developments in technology like 2G, 3G and more, and the arrival of the Internet of Things (IOT) – kicked off a new round of renewed efforts, especially from the manufacturing industry, to address sustainability through using telecom connectivity and the IOT to redesign the production process. Over time, this was expanded to address the entire supply chain.

I 4.0 used IOT to automate, algorithmize, machine learn and virtually control many activities of the supply chain. For example, the automobile assembly line was upgraded from JIT to I 4.0 JIT, through digitalisation. The digitalisation trend began to connect companies with their vendors and suppliers at the 'back end', and with their 'sales and distribution channels' in the front end. The Big Data advancements aided this move and companies began to realise that I 4.0, with IOT, can not only increase productivity, but also bring down consumption rates across the board. Over time, IOT evolved into IIOT – Industrial IOT. This was a natural evolution as application of IOT was a natural fit in the scheme of things like Big Data, digital marketing and customer servicing, assembly line operations, and much more.

While the covid disruption led to a temporary halt to such activities, it also brought into focus the 'resilient supply chains. IIOT was soon uploaded with this aspect too, and, with the installation of huge 'Cloud Computing Centres', IIOT platforms began to appear.

Link to the published article



As industries embraced Industry 4.0, the need for Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) platforms has never been greater. From enabling predictive maintenance to optimizing energy use and ensuring resilient operations, IIoT platforms are increasingly seen as the digital backbone of connected enterprises. Several companies have introduced IIOT platform products in the global market.

Classification	Players	Market Strategy
Global	Eaton, Siemens, Schneider Electric ABB	Geographic coverage and offer
Specialist	Janitza, Satec, Elspec, Socomec	Lower cost specialised software for metering applications
Local/Regional	CET, Elemeasure, Kon Sys, Accuenergy	Price and adaptation capabilities to local needs

Source: Research by co-author Aditya Gupta

Yet, many organizations and technology providers face a common reality: selling IIoT platforms is harder than selling hardware. Unlike a physical product that can be touched, tested, and measured, the value of a digital platform is often abstract, future-oriented, and dependent on integration within complex ecosystems.

Research has shown several recurring challenges across markets:

- **Value perception gap**: Customers struggle to connect platform capabilities with tangible ROI.
- **Digital readiness mismatch**: Many companies are still early in their transformation journey, with fragmented systems and unclear budget ownership.
- **Sales capability gaps**: Traditional sales teams are strong on product knowledge but often lack confidence in explaining platform benefits.
- **Competitive noise**: With AI agents, startups, and OEMs all pitching digital platforms, differentiation becomes harder.

Moreover, customer psychology also plays a key role. Factors like alignment with strategic goals and sustainability commitments, evidence of ROI through PoCs (Proof of Concepts), and simple, relatable narratives that avoid jargon often outweigh pricing or technical specifications in driving IIoT buying decisions. Going forward, it is felt that companies will need to reframe their sales playbooks. Instead of focusing on features, the conversation is shifting toward business outcomes and customer transformation journeys. In the market, this would mean selling value stacks instead of products, generic messaging, consultative engagement, sales enablement and establishing proof of concept.

From a research conducted by one of the authors, it appears that companies need to keep in mind the following factors to succeed in the IIOT market.

Incorporating government bodies in go-to-market strategy: Government policies are significantly influencing the subjective norm and eventually purchase intention. Hence the go to market approach should transform a bit and must include government organizations, consultants, auditors, and other institutional bodies. These additions will be helpful in increasing Schneider Electric's market reach and target the customers which need IIoT platform driven energy management solution.

Aligning business models with diverse company strategies: Company strategy is the main factor behind perceived usefulness and the purchase intention. However, the strategy differentiates from company to company. Building customers have company strategy to increase energy efficiency and cost savings for operational management. Industry having MNC parent organizations need energy management systems for reporting to headquarters, including energy, safety, and cybersecurity metrics. Their Indian ancillary organizations need systems that address inventory and quality control needs for Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). Rest owner-driven businesses focusses on solutions that provide a fast return on investment (ROI) hence a bundled solution of meters and software can be a good solution. Overall, business model should be transformed in such a way that it aligns with the specific company strategy.

Addressing company-specific problems in marketing: Problems in the company are the strong influencers for purchase intentions, hence it is necessary to understand problems related energy management from segment to segment. In the marketing pitch it is necessary to ensure clear value propositions that demonstrate how your platform helps customers achieve their goals (e.g., energy savings, improved inventory management).

Provide targeted customer faqs to ease the convincing process: Build the comprehensive list of the potential concerns or questions that customers generally have about the IIoT software. Create special FAQ sheet for those specific audiences with questions and concerns most likely to arise with these audiences and their specific interests. Provide this list of questions to the salesforce to ensure they are ready to readily counter check with clients and thus making it easy to persuade the customers on why they should acquire the software.

Implement advanced training programs for sales expertise: Shift from novice trainings to professional specialisation training that will help to establish substantial qualifications among the sales force. These programs should include detail knowledge and understanding of products, commercial skills, and knowledge in specialized fields. Offering constant staff training and development on IIoT and its software products is crucial to make the sales employees to be masters of the trade resulting to better sales.

Conclusion
As Industry 4.0 matures, IIoT platforms will be the backbone of digital transformation. But adoption depends as much on how they are sold as on what they deliver. The new sales playbook is clear:

- From products to platforms
- From features to outcomes
- From RFPs to PoCs
- From transactional selling to consultative partnerships

IIoT sales is not just a technical challenge—it's a human one. Companies that combine proof-driven engagement with a structured framework will lead the way in turning Industry 4.0 from vision into reality.

About the authors:
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(This article has used research findings from Aditya Gupta's Capstone Project that he did in his course PGEMP at Bhavans SPJIMR, Mumbai)

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