

DATASTREAMOMS⁺

How a World-Leading HVAC Manufacturer Modernized Distribution Without Slowing the Business

For distributors, modernization is an imperative that promises greater efficiency while carrying the risk of disrupting vital operations. It is an unavoidable step toward a future where agility must coexist with complexity.

The challenge is clear: adopting new technology without disrupting the essential daily operations the business relies on. Legacy systems may be dated, but they are often deeply tuned to how distribution actually works.

A world-leading HVAC manufacturer and distributor faced this challenge head-on while transforming its core systems. Rather than treating the initiative as a technology upgrade alone, leadership framed it as a business process transformation. The objective was explicit: modernize the foundation without slowing sales, confusing branches, or compromising customer experience. By positioning the effort this way, the transformation became a business priority, not an IT project, one that demanded executive attention because of its direct operational and revenue impact.

Distribution at Scale Is an Operational Reality

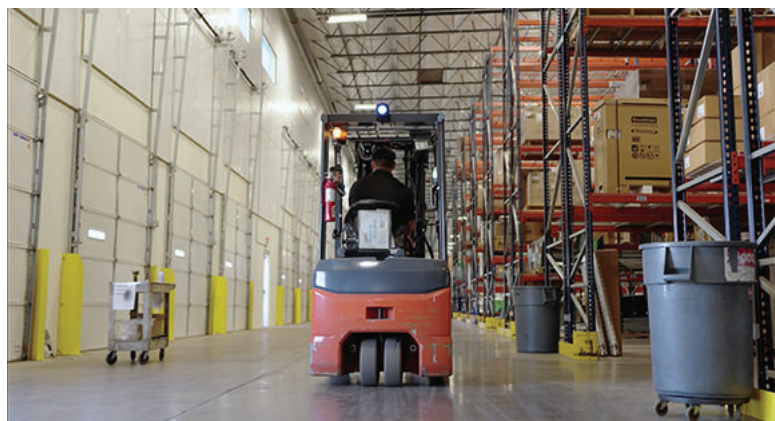
The organization operates an extensive North American distribution network, with more than 400 locations spanning internal branches and independent distributors. The business supports high-volume HVAC distribution across a wide range of products, channels, and customer types.

In this environment, distribution is not a back-office function; it is the front line of revenue.

Every system decision directly affects:

- Counter speed
- Order accuracy
- Branch productivity
- Customer trust

These realities shaped every aspect of the modernization strategy. Consider the stakes: a 30-second delay in order processing, repeated thousands of times each day, compounds quickly eroding revenue, increasing labor cost, and weakening customer confidence. Framed this way, the urgency becomes operational, not theoretical.



Why ERP Transformations Often Struggle in Distribution

Enterprise platforms such as SAP are powerful, but distribution leaders understand the risk. Systems designed for broad industries may struggle to support distribution-specific processes without significant adaptation.

Common pain points include:

- Slower order entry
- Too many clicks for everyday transactions
- Difficulty handling exceptions and substitutions
- Long training cycles and slow adoption
- Workarounds that undermine standardization

Leadership recognized early that order management would be the make-or-break area of the transformation. If order execution slowed, the business would feel it immediately: at the branch, with customers, and on the revenue line.

Order Management: Where Strategy Meets Reality

Order management is where strategic systems investments translate into real operational performance. It determines

whether sales teams operate with friction or flow, whether customers receive orders quickly and accurately, and whether small errors are caught before they cascade through distribution and fulfillment.

While SAP provided the scalable, standardized core required for long-term growth, a clear gap emerged in distribution-specific order execution. Over many years, the legacy environment had evolved with custom code and processes designed around branches and counter teams daily processes.

The question was not whether to modernize, but how to do so without losing those operational advantages.

Preserving Distribution Speed While Standardizing the Core

The approach was deliberate:

- Commit to SAP as the enterprise foundation
- Protect the selling experience where revenue is generated
- Avoid over-customizing the SAP core
- Reduce risk to branches and sales teams

To bridge the gap between enterprise standardization and distribution reality, the organization implemented OMS+, an



SAP-native order management layer purpose-built for complex distribution environments. Operating directly on real-time SAP data, this layer simplified how users interact with the system every day. The result was faster order processing and reduced friction addressing the revenue risk inherent in high-volume distribution.

This approach maintained a clean, scalable SAP core without forcing distribution teams to conform to generic workflows that slow execution.

What Changed for Branches and Sales Teams

For branch, counter, and sales teams, the impact was immediate and tangible:

- Intuitive order entry aligned to real distribution workflows
- Defaulted values based on user role and location
- Built-in prompts for substitutions and

- product restrictions
- Clear visibility into orders that need attention
- Fewer screens, fewer errors, and less manual rework

The result was not simply a better interface. It was faster adoption and more consistent execution across locations.

“We strive to provide the highest level of customer service across all our channels,” said Troy Barber, Sr. Operations Director of Systems. “With OMS+ providing end-to-end order and sales visibility, we have real-time insights that reduce complexity for our employees while enhancing the customer experience. In addition, OMS+ enables us to attract employees, improve retention, and significantly decrease the time for employee training and onboarding.”

Go-Live at Scale: What the Business Learns Under Pressure

Going live at scale has a way of stripping theory out of a transformation. Processes that appear workable on paper are tested in real time by real people under real customer pressure.

SAP and extended warehouse management were deployed across an entire region at once, including multiple branch locations and a distribution hub.

For many teams, this was their first exposure to automated warehouse processes. As expected, challenges surfaced around data migration, process discipline, and integration complexity.

What became clear very quickly, however, was where disruption occurs during large-scale change. It was not in the long-term system strategy or architecture. It was in day-to-day order execution.

The experience reinforced an important lesson: during major system change, the fastest way to absorb disruption is to reduce friction at the point of order execution. Familiar, predictable workflows stabilize operations more effectively than extended training or documentation.

By focusing early on how orders would be executed at the branch and counter, the organization kept operations moving while underlying systems changed. Go-live did

not eliminate challenges, but it clarified where attention mattered most and where investment paid off fastest.

What Distribution Leaders Can Take Away

This experience offers several lessons for distribution executives evaluating modernization initiatives:

- Protect revenue flow first. Systems should accelerate selling, not slow it down.
- Order management deserves executive attention. It is where strategy becomes customer experience.
- User experience drives adoption. Adoption drives ROI.
- Standardization and differentiation can coexist. A clean core does not require generic operations.

Final Thought: Modernization That Respects Distribution Reality

This journey demonstrates that enterprise modernization can strengthen operational excellence when it respects how distribution operates.

With the right approach, systems modernization can improve efficiency without sacrificing speed, flexibility, or customer focus. For distribution leaders facing similar decisions, the message is clear: modernization works best when it is designed around the realities of distribution, not despite them.